March 1, 2026

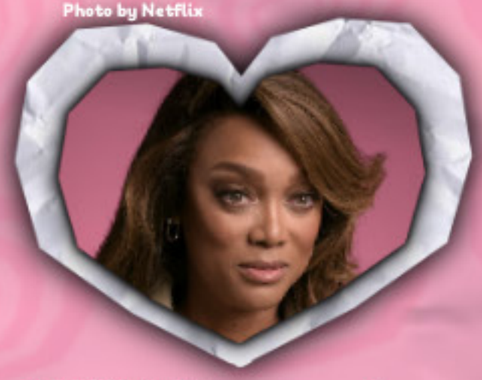
So Diva!

THE Girly Media Magazine

Photo by Shortcake IP Holdings LLC

Strawberry Shortcake Redesign?

Photo by Netflix



ANTM Docuseries: Will Tyra Ever Learn?

What is going on with Wuthering Heights?

Find out why everyone is hating on Wuthering Heights! From the casting to the music to the story...

Photo From Wuthering Heights Poster

Photo By Mattel

So Diva!

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Top DIVALICIOUS CREATORS Of The Month

1 Emily Ann Shupe

Emily Ann Shupe is a filmmaker whose works highlight everyday aspects of girlhood. "'Heyy' With Two Y's or One?" is a short film that follows Josie as she seeks advice from her friends about how to text back her crush. Check out this relatable story on Shupe's YouTube channel.

2 Ilyclemmie

Clementine or @ilyclemmie on YouTube is a girly filmmaker whose works feature queer Black people and other people of color navigating their lives. Her short films, like the most recent "Blue Moon Angels," explore friendship dynamics and sapphic relationships. She definitely deserves more support, please check her out!

3 CuteGamesClub

CuteGamesClub released "Patrochini" at the end of January, a cute game where you can grow your kingdom and create your friends. In February, the play testing for "Awkward Dinner Party" commenced! I was a part of Thursday's testing and the game is a really fun, deductive card game that reminds me of "Clue" and "Guess Who", I can't wait to see what they create next!

4 Panacea the Cleric

The other day I got an email from Panacea, stating they had seen my "Downfall of Girly Media" video and agreed on the point that Black women are not typically portrayed as soft or ultrafeminine. This is why they made "Bell Maiden's Bloom", an Otome game featuring a girly Black female lead and a diverse cast of interest, you can play the game on Itch.io @Panacea the Cleric.

5 Imani-Grace King

On February 1, Imani-Grace King announced her series "Again, Again, Again" on GutPunchTV. The series is a vertical romance drama series featuring a Black female lead. Check it out on gutpunchtv.com.

Photo By Maksim Brenner

Written by Fatma, Edited by Aminata and Maryam, Designed by Maryam

Passing of Catherine O'Hara

Catherine O'Hara, famous for her role as Kate McCallister in "Home Alone," and Delia Deetz in "Beetlejuice," had sadly passed away on January 30, 2026. As a fan of her work this devastated me, not only was she a great talent for general film audiences but she was a notable talent in girly media works as Duchess Rowena in "Barbie in the 12 Dancing Princesses," Jessica Wilhern in "Penelope," and Fru Pryselius in "Pippi Longstocking." All of which are properties I have enjoyed from childhood to my current adulthood. She will be greatly missed, not just by me but by film lovers everywhere. May she rest in peace.

-By Maryam

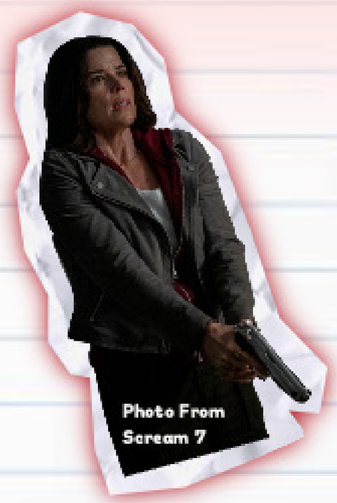


Photo From Scream 7

Scream 7 Announcement

"Scream 7" is the latest installment in the iconic horror franchise set to release on February 27, 2026. Directed by Kevin Williamson, the film brings back Neve Campbell as Sideny Prescott alongside Courtney Cox and Isabel May. The story follows Sidney as she tries to live a quiet life away from the violence of her past. That is until a new Ghostface killer emerges and targets her daughter. Sidney is forced to confront the trauma she thought she escaped and once again has to step into the fight to protect her family and end the bloodshed once and for all.

People We Meet on Vacation

"People We Meet on Vacation" is a romantic drama released on January 9, 2026 on Netflix. Directed by Brett Haley and based on the bestselling novel by Emily Henry, the film stars Emily Bader as Poppy and Tom Blyth as Alex who are lifelong best friends with completely opposite personalities. Though they live far apart, they reunite every summer for one week of adventure, maintaining a decade-long tradition that slowly reveals the deeper feelings and unresolved tensions between them. The film has received mixed reviews. Some critics argue that the charm of the book didn't fully translate to screen, citing the awkward character portrayal, excessive time jumps, and a lack of emotional sincerity that made the story feel rushed rather than heartfelt.

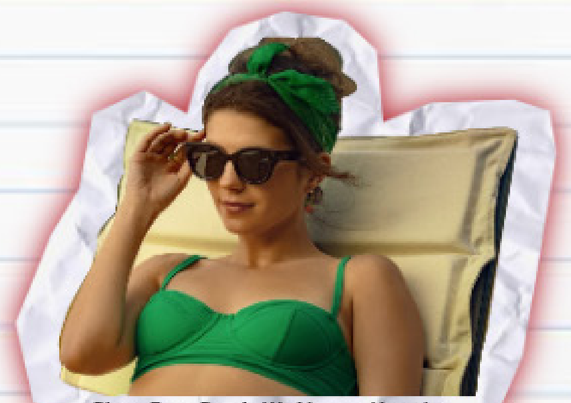


Photo From People We Meet on Vacation

Photo From Pretty in Pink

Pretty in Pink Release in Theaters (40th Anniversary)

"Pretty in Pink," the beloved 1986 teen romance, returned to theaters for its 40th anniversary celebration. Written by John Hughes and directed by Howard Deutch, the film stars Molly Ringwald as Andie, a creative high schooler caught in a love triangle between her longtime friend Duckie and wealthy classmate Blane. The re-release introduced the coming-of-age classic to a new generation while giving longtime fans a nostalgic big-screen experience.

Photo By Jon Kopaloff

Charlie XCX - The Moment

"The Moment" is a music mockumentary released on January 30, directed by Aidan Sairi and produced by Charli XCX and David Hinojosa. Starring Charli XCX as a fictionalized version of herself alongside Kylie Jenner, Francesca Dardani, Errol Brannet, and Rachel Sennott, the film follows the rising popstar in the chaotic lead-up to her arena tour debut during the height of "Brat Summer." As rehearsals intensify and media attention grows, she struggles with label pressure, public image expectations, creative control, and the emotional toll of being a celebrity.

Reception has been mixed. Some viewers describe the story as predictable and not as raw or unfiltered as its mockumentary style suggests, with what fans say is a lack of her music. Others praise the behind-the-scenes perspective and say the film captures the messy, high energy atmosphere of modern pop fame much like the trailer promised.

Love Me, Love Me Film, Based on a Wattpad

"Love Me, Love Me" is a romantic drama set to premiere worldwide on Prime Video on February 13, 2026. Directed by Roger Kumble and based on the international Wattpad phenomenon by Stefania S., the film stars Mia Jenkins as June White, Pepe Barroso Silva as James Hunter, and Luca Melucci as Will.

The story follows June, a young woman who moves to Italy after the tragic death of her brother, hoping a fresh start will help her heal. At her elite new school, she initially finds comfort in Will, the model student whose calm presence keeps her grounded. But everything changes when she meets James, a charismatic and troubled classmate known for his involvement in underground MMA fights.

Despite his rough exterior, something about James pulls at June in ways she can't ignore, pulling her into a difficult emotional triangle where loyalty, trust, and secrets blur. As hidden truths come to light and tensions rise, June must decide where her heart truly belongs, even as she confronts her own past and the complicated lives of those around her.

Photo From Love Me Love Me

TUBI's... CINEMA?

Terri Joe: Missionary in Miami REVIEW - By Maryam

This film is truly for those who are familiar with the character of Terri Joe. Before watching this movie I will admit I had pretty high standards, as a fan of the Terri Joe character, I clearly enjoyed their humor and was curious as to how that would translate to the screen.

The writing is very fast paced and the story jumps from plot point to plot point, it's a comedy with an almost episodic narrative. The editing at times feels cheap as during some points it's edited like a TikTok or YouTube video, which kinda removes the cinematic quality. The film also has a ton of gross-out humor like the grandmother character slurping her chicken and getting it all over her mouth. This could be funny for some, but since I get grossed out by that sort of thing, it did make those scenes hard to watch. There is another scene where a man in a wheelchair has an amputated leg with the genitals of his partner in it? To which he frequently does things to it, that I won't mention here due to it being just incredibly gross. The story is clearly not trying to take itself too seriously, at least in the beginning before slowly becoming "deeper." The message is clearly about those who weaponize religion as an excuse for their bigotry, which is a compelling message that I think was executed somewhat decently.

I definitely found myself laughing multiple times during the film. There were a lot of line deliveries that were extremely funny and the comedic timing was on point for the most part. One of my favorite running gags was when Beau (the main antagonist) mews to try to seduce women. The squinted eyes, hair blowing in the wind and awkward expression made it

Photo From Missionary in Miami

really funny to watch. Though I will say that despite it being humorous, I do think some of these jokes could be a little too far. I understand that Terri Joe, like Filthy Frank, is a character that is meant to be offensive, that's kind of the whole point. However, that argument does not hold up. Just because the character is supposed to be awful does not mean their offensive behavior is okay. For example, if a character in a film is highly bigoted, it's okay for that to be portrayed as long as the story clearly does not agree with the bigoted character's actions and beliefs. And while unlike Filthy Frank, I think it's clear that the film does not agree with Terri Joe's beliefs in general, some jokes, specifically jokes about communities Kelon is not a part of, definitely do seem to be portrayed in a funny and lighthearted way. I could understand why people of those communities would feel offended. That being said, I'm not exactly sure how to properly make a comedy about a problematic main character that also calls out the problematic behavior of said character.

All in all, this was generally a decent film, not anything groundbreaking but not exactly horrible. It was a funny but mediocre movie. The film did fail to meet my expectations, but not egregiously so. That being said, I give Terri Joe: Missionary in Miami a ⅗ stars.

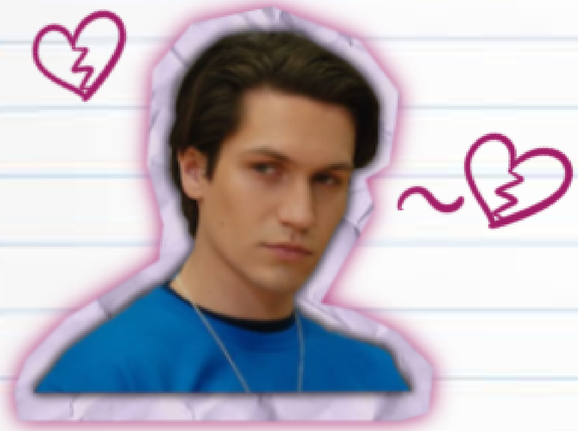


Photo From How to Lose a Popularity Contest

How to Lose a Popularity Contest REVIEW - By Fatma

"How to Lose a Popularity Contest" is a Tubi teen romcom starring Chase Hudson and Sara Waisglass, directed by Stephen Campanelli and released on January 16, 2026, it came with very low expectations from audiences. Many assumed it would be another influencer movie with no depth, but surprisingly the film turned out to be far more watchable than people predicted. While it did end up being a standard teen romcom, the film manages to have some good quality characteristics. I came into the movie expecting it to be extremely bad. But as it progressed I was impressed by a lot of things.

For one, the acting was spectacular. Although there were some cringey moments, I do believe they were done purposely because it is a teen movie. Not to mention, I found Ellie, the female lead, to be extremely unbearing at certain points. And although this might be seen as negative, the fact that the movie garnered a lot of emotion from me and a lot of other people is important. She was meant to be portrayed as a dislikable character to give her a good character growth arc. She was obsessed with proving her ex wrong and during that she completely lost herself. Now while this is an interesting plot, I had mixed feelings because we didn't get to see Ellie pursue her passion, just plotting and scheming. Several times I found myself rooting for Lil Huddy's character (Nate) who ended up being my favorite character. While Ellie and the whole school painted him as a slacker and a troublemaker, there was a lot more to him than what meets the eye. He was flirtatious and had more depth than people credited him.

One thing I really did NOT like were the supporting characters. They were more like bystanders than supporting characters. When Ellie was plotting, they did nothing but just give comments. They allowed Ellie to be self destructive. And although this was necessary for Ellie so she is able to learn, the fact they did nothing... rubbed me the wrong way. Also, when she got dumped they didn't even STAY with her. Even though the break up was lowkey her fault, the least they could do was be there for her. And I do know it's a romcom not a coming of age story, but that's not what friends do.

Another thing I noticed is that the movie does struggle with romantic development. While it was definitely a slow burn, I wish there were more cute moments and interactions in general between the leads. Even their kiss lacked spark. Although they were often together, it lacked some emotional buildup and the romance didn't seem fully earned. Even after the classic misunderstanding after everything is good, it seemed lackluster. Ellie was lowkey evil for what she did and though she did learn her lesson, she didn't work hard enough for forgiveness. Not to mention Nate didn't get as upset as much as he should've.

Lastly, I hate the ending. Now I won't spoil, but the ending for me personally makes or breaks the film. But in my opinion it was anticlimactic.

Overall, the film is not groundbreaking, but it's not as disastrous as I expected.. It's a decent entertaining romcom with many cute moments and a lot of awkward teenage moments. I give How to Lose a Popularity Contest a 3.5/5.

Photo By Netflix

Written by Fatma, Edited by Aminata and Maryam, Designed by Maryam

America's Next Top Model Docuseries

A new three-part Netflix documentary examining "America's Next Top Model" and its legacy premiered on February 16, bringing renewed attention to the infamous reality competition show and its creator, Tyra Banks. The announcement immediately sparked widespread discussion online, as former contestants, judges, and other figures reflect and confess on the show's impact.

The series features interviews with former contestants, behind-the-scenes staff and contributors to the show. It revisits infamous moments from various cycles, often parking clips with present day commentary from the people involved. This structure allowed viewers to see how contestants experienced events in real time versus how they were edited and presented to audiences. This documentary also touches on the judging panel and mentors and how they viewed the broader cultural influence the show had on beauty standards, reality television, and the modeling industry.

One of the strongest elements praised by viewers is that the docuseries gives former contestants a platform to tell their stories in their own words. Many felt it allowed them to reclaim their narratives that have been heavily edited or misrepresented during the show's original airing. The editing of the documentary itself was also noted positively. In several cases, it contradicts contestants' current reflections with original show footage, helping audiences understand their perspective more clearly. Importantly, the documentary generally avoids mocking the contestants or exaggerating their trauma but instead presents it in a serious and empathetic way.

Despite these positives, much of the negative reaction was about accountability or should I say the lack of it. Many viewers felt that the judges, mentors, and producers largely deflected responsibility, often framing questionable decisions as "industry reality" or saying they would not handle situations the same way today.

For example, one widely discussed clip shows photographer Nigel Barker chastising a contestant for not speaking up after being made uncomfortable by a male model. In the documentary, he responds by saying he was simply being realistic at the time and that he would approach it differently now, something that Tyra Banks also mentioned.

Similarly, the infamous moment where a contestant was pressured to close the gap in her teeth is revisited. It is revealed that the industry agents told her she would struggle to book jobs without altering her appearance which is not true at all.

However, the most disturbing criticism involved a deeply traumatic incident with contestant Shandi. According to the documentary, she was intoxicated and sexually assaulted while cameras continued filming. The footage was later edited to frame her as a consensual cheater rather than a victim. The show's production team reportedly justified their actions by stating contestants had agreed to constant filming and that they did not perceive a need to intervene. When this incident is discussed in the documentary, viewers noted that it was addressed briefly and without meaningful accountability, which many found upsetting.

A sentiment that Tyra Banks repeated throughout the documentary is that she did not have a final decision in production despite her being the executive producer. Overall, critics argue that while the series acknowledges harm, it often stops short of fully confronting responsibility. Some believe the documentary feels partly like an attempt by former contributors to reshape their public image or gain sympathy.

She ends with "you have no idea what I'm planning for cycle 25."

Star Detective Precure

"Star Detective Precure!" is the 23rd installment in the long-running Pretty Cure franchise, premiering on February 1, 2026, and directed by Koji Kawasaki. The series follows Anna Akechi, a 14-year-old middle school student from 2027 who is transported back in time to 1999 on her birthday with the help of a fairy named Pochitan and a magical pendant she found in her room. In Makoto Mirai City, she meets Mikuru Kobayashi, an aspiring young detective, and the two are quickly pulled into a string of theft cases linked to the elusive "Phantom Thieves." Determined to help those in trouble, Anna and Mikuru transform into Cure Answer and Cure Mystique, forming the Star Detective Precure. Together, they run the CUREtto Detective Agency, solving mysteries while searching for a way to send Anna back to her own time. The series has been met with overwhelmingly positive reception, with fans praising its detective theme, nostalgic time-travel setting, and dynamic duo lead characters.

Photo From Toei Animation

56 Days

"56 Days" is an erotic thriller series based on the best-selling novel by Catherine Ryan Howard, premiered February 18, 2026 exclusively on Prime Video. Developed by Lisa Zwerling and Karyn Usher and produced by Amazon MGM Studios and Atomic Monster, the eight-episode mystery follows Ciara Wyse (Dove Cameron) and Oliver Kennedy (Avan Jogia) after a chance supermarket encounter leads to a whirlwind romance that ends in murder just 56 days later. As homicide investigators dig into a decomposed body and the couple's intense past, the narrative alternates between present-day investigation and the passionate, obsessive relationship that preceded it. The series blends psychological suspense with romance and crime, and early perception has highlighted its steamy chemistry, gripping premise, and emotional depth. Some fans, however, note its shift from the book's original context and the challenges of adapting its suspense for television.

Photo From 56 Days

Pretty Pretty Please Episode 2 - By Maryam

"Pretty Pretty Please I Don't Want to be a Magical Girl" released episode 2 on January 31. The episode has accumulated 1.3 million views as of the writing of this issue. Fans are excited for what's next to come and an upcoming animated version of the first episode has been announced.

Photo By Kiana Khansmith

Ikoku Nikki Anime Adaptation

Premiering on January 4, 2026, "Journal with Witch" ("Ikoku Nikki") is a josei slice-of-life anime adapted from the acclaimed manga by Tomoko Yamashita. The series centers on Makio Kodai, an emotionally guarded novelist who suddenly becomes the guardian of her 15-year-old niece, Asa Takumi, after her sister's death. "Ikoku Nikki" is not a reinvention of family, but a quiet, intimate portrayal of two people learning how to coexist while carrying grief, loneliness, and unspoken emotions. The anime focuses on everyday moments like shared meals, awkward silences, and small breakthroughs that slowly form into a family bond. Early reception has highlighted its gentle storytelling and mature tone, with viewers praising its faithful adaptation of the manga's introspective style and its rare focus on grief and healing from an adult female perspective.

Photo From Ikoku Nikki

Photo From The Beauty

The Beauty

"The Beauty" is a body horror thriller series released on January 21, 2026 on Hulu, created by Ryan Murphy and based on the graphic novel series of the same name. The story follows partners Drew Foster and Kara Vaughn as they investigate a mysterious sexually transmitted disease known as "The Beauty," which grants those infected extreme physical attractiveness before turning fatal. As models, influencers, and celebrities begin dying, the agents uncover a conspiracy involving corrupt officials, corporate cover-ups, and a mercenary determined to keep the truth buried. The series stars Evan Peters as Cooper Madsen, Anthony Ramos as The Assassin, Ashton Kutcher as powerful villainous biotech executive Byron Frost, and Bella Hadid as supermodel Ruby Vale, one of the most high-profile victims connected to the outbreak.

Blending beautiful visuals with disturbing body horror, the show uses dark satire to explore society's obsession with beauty, fame, and perfection. Public reception has been positive to mixed. Many viewers praise the series' striking cinematography, dark humor, social commentary, and the underlying romantic and sexual tension between characters. However, critics argue the central "beauty virus" formula becomes repetitive, with episodes following a similar structure. Others feel the celebrity characters serve more as visual props than fully developed roles, and that the story lacks truly shocking twists or sustained terror, making it feel more stylish than suspenseful.

Bridgerton Season 4, Part 2

Released on February 26, 2026 in Netflix, the second half of "Bridgerton" Season 4 delivers the final four episodes of the season, starring Luke Thompson as Benedict Bridgerton and Yerin Ha as Sophie Baek to a long-teased romance to its emotional conclusion. This arc centers on Benedict finally confronting the rigid class expectations of Regency society as he chooses love over status, pursuing Sophie, a maid whose true identity as the illegitimate daughter of an Earl places her at the center of scandal. The stakes rise when Sophie is arrested by her cruel stepmother, forcing Benedict to publicly defend her and challenge the social order he once comfortably floated within.

Part 2 has been widely praised for its romantic intensity and visual aesthetics. Critics and fans alike highlight the chemistry between the leads, describing the romance as both tender and steamy, and many note the classic Cinderella-inspired tone. The season's lavish costumes, set design, and cinematography were heavily praised and many viewers point to Benedict's evolution into a confident leading man as one of the show's strongest character arcs to date. However, public perception is not unanimously positive. Some critics argue that the series is beginning to feel formulaic and predictable, with familiar plots that lack the urgency of earlier seasons.

A portion of the fanbase has also criticized the slower pacing, noting a lack of yearning and emotional tension compared to past romances calling it childish and less like an adult series. Additionally, side plots have been called underdeveloped and distracting, with viewers expressing frustration over time spent on minor characters rather than deepening the central love story. While critical reception remains solid around 80–83% on Rotten Tomatoes, audience scores dipped to 52%, showing a growing divide between long-time fans.

Photo From Bridgerton

Photo By Shortcake IP Holdings LLC

Strawberry Shortcake 2026 Reboot

On February 4, 2026, WildBrain officially unveiled a new Strawberry Shortcake reboot, reintroducing the character through a digital-first content slate that blends classic nostalgia with modern animation trends. The relaunch boasts several projects beyond the main show. The flagship project is "The Berry Best Baking Show," a 12-episode live-action/3D hybrid series launching in batches beginning March 19, 2026, on YouTube. Each short episode features a CG-animated Strawberry interacting with real-life young bakers, teaching simple recipes while emphasizing friendship and creativity. Alongside it, a new unnamed CG minisode series (26 episodes, 3–4 minutes each) will focus on short adventures with her "Berry Besties," while 52 micro-shorts starring Strawberry and Custard began rolling out weekly starting February 5, 2026. The reboot also includes lo-fi ambience videos designed for relaxation viewing, signaling an expansion into lifestyle-style digital content.

Visually, Strawberry Shortcake's redesign leans heavily into a modernized version of the classic 1980s look, incorporating a 3D style while keeping recognizable features like her outfit silhouette, color palette, and her iconic curls. The relaunch is also tied to other licensing efforts, including collaborations in gaming, cosmetics, and lifestyle products. Although there has been no official announcements, products are expected.

Public perception of the redesign has been mixed but deeply nostalgic. Many longtime fans express strong emotional attachment to earlier eras (anything before 2019) and view the new design positively for "returning to her roots" for a newer audience. Others remain hesitant about the shift to 3D animation preferring traditional 2D styles and describing the face as "Pixar-like" or "Sugar Rush Racer vibes," though some believe the look will grow on audiences over time. The outfit, hair design, and overall cuteness have been widely praised, especially for the 80s nostalgia.

Discussion around the reboot has also resurfaced broader franchise history, including renewed attention to original creator Barbi Sargent, who lost control of the character rights early in the brand's commercialization and has not benefited financially from its continued success.

Photo By Dress To Impress Team

Written by Makayla, Edited by Aminata and Fatma, Designed by Maryam

DTI Valentine's Day Update

Released on February 7, 2026, the Valentine's 2026 update delivered one of the game's most expansive seasonal refreshes to date, with new items and major system upgrades. The update introduced a reworked Male Body Type, a new Materials+ gamepass, a Daily Login pass, and a reworked dressing room, alongside multiple quality-of-life improvements and refreshed UI icons. There were also updates to Haley's Bear Set, two new Walk Packs, and a new Pose Pack.

The Valentine's 2025 quests returned and you can earn Candy Hearts, a limited-time currency used to purchase exclusive items, walk packs, and pose packs. The update's new item lineup leaned heavily into soft romance and Paris-chic aesthetics, featuring free additions like lace nightgowns, ballet dresses and shoes, cozy crochet sets, baguette bags, aviator-inspired outfits, and hair accessories. Public perception has been largely positive, with players praising the generosity of free items, the long-requested body-type rework, and the smoother customization experience, cementing the update as a standout seasonal release.

-By Fatma

Indie Game Review Bookshop Simulator

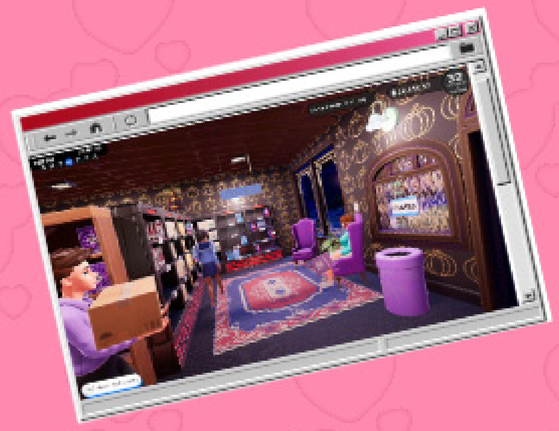
Bookshop Simulator was first released in early access during September 2025. The developing studio, Blep Games, released an Early Access Roadmap by the end of September and has since released several updates, slowly improving the game. Most recently, Cafe functionality was added, which adds a completely new layer to the game. Players currently have to act as the cafe employee themselves, though, because cafe employees haven't been implemented yet (this should be coming soon). See the full game review below.

Bookshop Simulator is a satisfying store simulator, where you can run your very own bookshop! You begin your bookshop empire in the quaint town of Lyon, and can eventually expand to Paris and even Japan. The mechanics are simple and effective, from checking out customers at the register to ordering books, restocking, and even decorating the store.

As you continue operating your store, you will increase your player level and store level. When you reach certain level milestones, items for your store are unlocked, like new stock options, including different books, candy, and board games. The game has everything you'd hope for as far as gameplay goes. While the art style leaves much to be desired, it does the job, and I have to point out the large combination of clothing, hairstyle, and accessories that customers can spawn wearing. This provides a nice level of realism to the game because it makes it feel like you are serving a lot of different customers.

Something I hope they address in the future with a new game mechanic is the number of customers that visit your shop. Right now, it feels like there's an endless stream of customers, and in reality, that just wouldn't be the case. I think it would pose a nice challenge to have to implement some marketing efforts to get people to know about your store. Discounty, a grocery shop life sim released during Summer 2025, does this very well. They utilize a system where the player has to print and hang flyers around the town. The flyers expire after one week, and depending on how many and which specific flyers you choose to hang, they influence the number of customers who visit your grocery store and what they are hoping to buy.

Overall, what Bookshop Simulator does right is the simple and effective gameplay. From interacting with the stock ordering system to the custom placement of bookshelves and decoration around the bookstore, to the satisfying restocking animation, this game is a must-try for any retail simulator enthusiast.



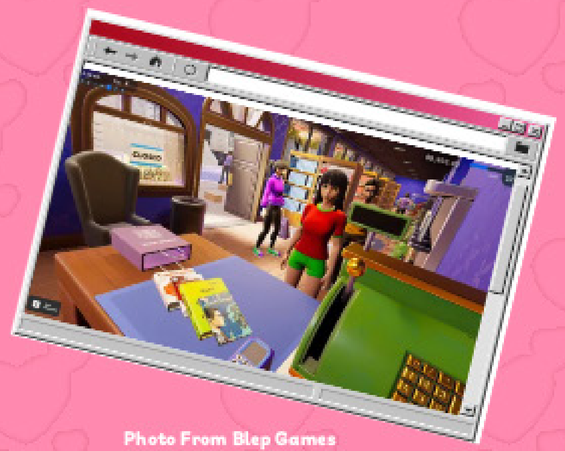
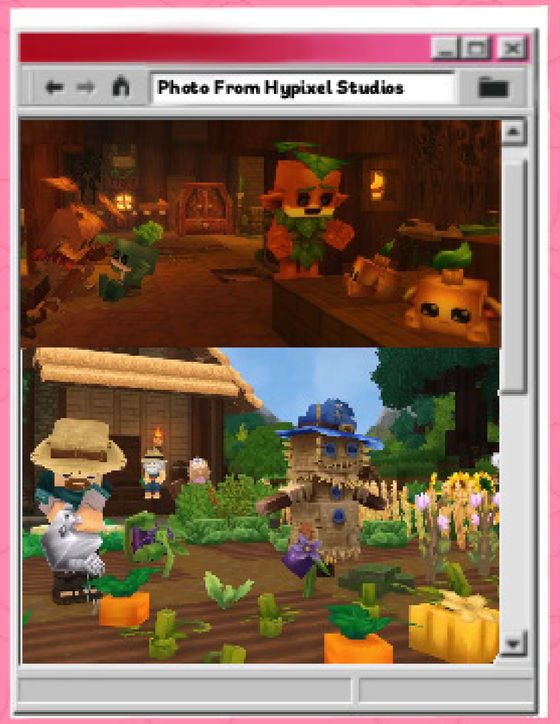


Photo From Blep Games



Hytale Early Access

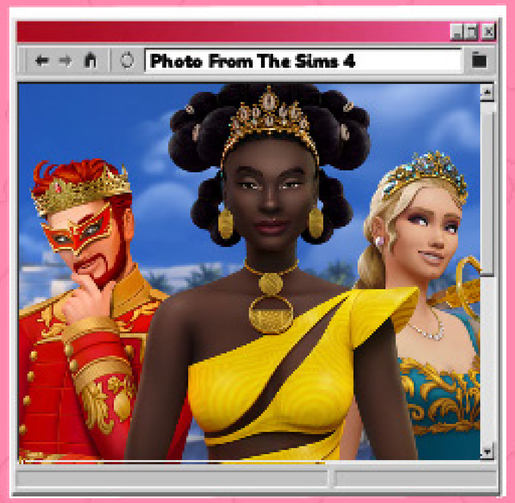
Hytale is a Minecraft-like sandbox game currently available to play on PC. It recently entered early access release on January 13, 2026, after a somewhat catastrophic development timeline. Hytale was originally acquired by Riot Games in 2020. After years of strenuous development, the game was ultimately canceled by Riot, resulting in significant financial loss. However, the original developers, Hypixel Studios, swooped in to reacquire the game after a #savehytale movement sparked online. The game features a procedurally generated world, including typical resource and crafting game mechanics. You can expect to encounter an array of other living creatures around the world, including enemies (skeletons, spiders, bears, oh my!), and friendly creatures, too, like squirrels, sheep, rabbits, and more. The game is already highly praised by players online due to its more "lively" environment compared to Minecraft. There is also a creative mode available for those who'd just like to focus on building.

Tomodachi Life: Living the Dream Nintendo Direct + Release Date Announced

After 13 years, Tomodachi Life is finally receiving a sequel! Tomodachi Life is a life simulator game, and will feature the nostalgic "Mii" character design, which was first introduced on the Nintendo Wii in 2006. The game will feature an island setting and will move in real time, both elements that mimic Animal Crossing New Horizons. Reception to the Nintendo Direct seems positive, as most fans gave up hope of ever receiving a sequel; it turns out to be a very welcome surprise. The Nintendo Direct featured a light narrative to showcase the many things that can happen on your island, and it was very surprisingly exciting to watch. Fans are already memeing some of the characters featured in the direct (Hugh Morris, I'm looking at you). You can play Tomodachi Life: Living the Dream on your Nintendo Switch 1 (or 2) on April 16, 2026.

Slime Rancher Celebrates 10th Anniversary

Slime Rancher celebrates its 10 year anniversary with a celebration event at Gallery Nucleus in California. The beloved franchise is revered for its incredibly cute and colorful art direction and fun gameplay enjoyed by all ages. Slime Rancher 1 and 2 have sold a combined total of 17 millions copies worldwide and the developing studio, Monomi Park, continues work on Slime Rancher 2 with updates throughout 2026. Monomi Park thanks fans for creating a warm and welcoming community. You can watch the celebration event on YouTube on the channel @Monomi Park.



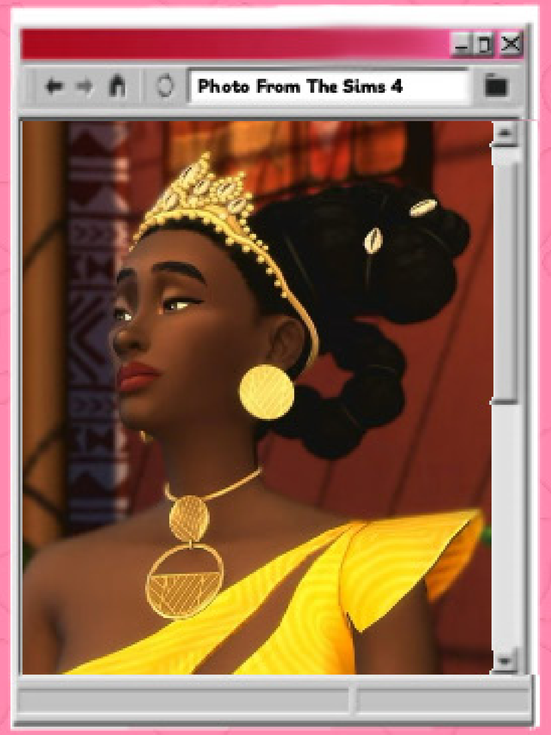
Frog Island Playtesting Begins Soon

Frog Island is a 2D frog collector game currently in development. The gameplay appears to be similar to Neko Atsume: Kitty Collector, and the art is just as kawaii. Frog Island is expected to include several mini games, typical decorating gameplay, and many different frog breeds to collect. Playtesting is set to begin soon, as solo development continues toward the full release during Summer 2026. If you want to keep up to date with the game's development or check out the trailer, you can find the dev (@realdevfrog) on YouTube.

The Sims 4 Royalty and Legacy Pack Set to Release Amidst Game-Breaking Bugs

It's no secret that The Sims 4 (TS4) has been plagued with a gamebreaking bug (save file corruption) for years now. This bug became very prevalent around the release of the For Rent expansion pack in late 2023, but did exist before then. Since then, the team has made progress on it, but the overall consensus is that the game is just too big to contain. In a written release from last year, the developers advised players with a list of the most "simulation heavy" items, and stated players should use these items sparingly if they experience gameplay lag. Included in this list were very basic items like refrigerators, computers, and even doors.

Amid the current state of the game, The Sims 4 is still scheduled to release another expansion



pack themed around "legacy"—this is ironic when considering the fact that large or old save files are more prone to corruption, which makes the premise of playing a legacy save file risky. Another common report has been about in-game photos turning black, which means any evidence or memories players create of their legacy families have the potential to be wiped without so much as a notice or any way to get them back.

At the time of writing this, there are currently 32 bug reports under investigation, 137 bug reports that need more information, and 3 bug reports with fixes on the way.

Note: A legacy save file is a type of game save in The Sims 4 where players' main focus is generational storytelling. This means playing a lot of sims over a long period of time to develop a lineage. The longer someone plays a legacy, it usually means the larger and more detailed their save file becomes, which is where the save corruption bug becomes a significant risk.

Game Developers Conference (GDC) Festival of Gaming: State of the Game Industry 2026 Report

The lengthy report, which interviews over 2,300 people, was completed to provide an overview of attitudes toward generative AI, industry layoffs, unionization, and more. In short, the game industry looks a little bit bleak right now. With an increase in the prevalence of generative AI, as well as constant layoffs in the AAA space, students and recent graduates fear for their job prospects, as they're now forced to compete with industry veterans who've been laid off. The report also outlines a significant positive view toward unionization, with 82% of survey respondents in favor of it. This is a timely discussion in lieu of the Public Investment Fund (PIF)'s looming acquisition of Electronic Arts (EA) later this year, of which EA has publicly stated "there will be no immediate change to jobs or daily operation"—immediate being the key cause for concern here.

For some time, the game industry has been known as one with very minimal protections for employees. It has come under fire in the past for overworking staff and lacking diversity. As for some more intriguing news, it seems the handheld Steam Deck is among the most popular consoles and survey respondents rate it on par with the Nintendo Switch 2 as far as the top consoles they'd like to develop for. This is important to note, as the survey suggests PC is still the top platform developers intend to build for.

You can access the full report at gdconf.com

-By Fatma

In late 2025, nostalgia turned into trauma revival when a viral TikTok blew up asking if anyone remembered Star Girl. What began as a simple throwback quickly evolved into deep dives and rumors about one of mobile gaming's strangest controversies. A fashion game for kids that allegedly exposed young players to disturbing chat interactions.

A Brief History of the Game

Originally developed by Animoca Brands, Star Girl was a widely popular early 2010s mobile game. The concept was simple and highly appealing to young players: create a fashionable avatar, buy outfits, become famous, and collect boyfriends. The formula was wildly successful. By 2015, the game had reportedly reached over 65 million downloads. Its popularity led to numerous spin-offs like Star Girl: Princess Gala and Star Girl: Glam City, which were essentially recycled versions of the same gameplay loop. Despite being marketed toward tweens and rated as suitable for very young players, the game's themes were surprisingly mature. Dating mechanics, nightclub settings, and competitive social hierarchies were important to gameplay. But behind the glitz and glam was a feature that would later overshadow the game's legacy: Star Chat.

The "Star Chat" Controversy

The controversy traces back to an old Reddit thread titled "My Dark History With Star Girl." In the post, a former player described unsettling interactions with the game's boyfriend chat system. The user wrote: "There was part of the game that I remember every once in a while that doesn't sit right with me. It

was a chat option, where you could talk to your boyfriends and potential boyfriends and I shit you not they would sext you and cuss...(The boyfriends were supposed to be NPCs)."

As the post resurfaced years later, thousands of people claimed they had experienced similar messages. TikTok videos discussing the topics quickly went viral, gaining hundreds of thousands of likes and fueling rumors and theories. According to many accounts across social media, these characters sometimes responded in crass and explicit language; shared personal details like age, name, phone numbers, and locations; and sometimes roleplayed inappropriately. These experiences led to alarming theories such as the chats being connected to real people, the system being hacked, or the developers hiring humans to respond.

Ex-players also reported strange patterns such as replies in multiple languages (sometimes even if the app is set to English); use of slang, typos, and human-like texting styles; and

occasionally aggressive or explicit messages. Not to mention, many players encountered these types of behaviors when they were quite young. When you are being groomed online as a child, whether by a chatbot or a real person, the psychological trauma that results from it is real. It will feel like a real person (especially if it's meant to simulate a real person) behind the screen is actually grooming you with the intent of doing so. Because of this, many people believed there were real people behind the chats. But who was really behind this deeply disturbing behavior?

SimSimi

Years later, an archived APK version of the game revealed a critical clue: the Star Chat system using SimSimi. Created by a Korean ISMAKER, SimSimi is an early AI chatbot that first launched in 2002. SimSimi didn't get any attention outside of Asia until 2012 when it became an app on IOS and Android. From that point onward, everything went downhill as more and more users downloaded the app.

While innovative, it quickly became infamous for producing vulgar, threatening, and nonsensical responses because users could teach it anything.

This explains why Star Chat messages often felt disturbingly human. The bot was able to copy real speech patterns, learn slang and spelling mistakes, and generate unpredictable and inappropriate replies. This became the most widely accepted conclusion today. The players were interacting with an unfiltered AI chatbot, not real individuals. However, for a game marketed to very young audiences, the decision to integrate such a system without safeguards caused extreme backlash.

The Aftermath

Sometime between June and October 2014, the star chat feature quietly disappeared. It was replaced with generic pre-written messages similar to other dating game apps, which many say should've been in place already. Notably, there was no official statement addressing the controversy or acknowledging the issue publicly. Today, the game remains a strange piece of internet history. Star Girl's lore feels eerie today. Long before AI chatbots became more common or mainstream, this game perfectly demonstrates the danger of allowing a chatbot with learning systems put in place to mimic humans without safeguards... especially in spaces designed for younger users. For many, Star Girl is still a nostalgic memory of fashion, boyfriends, and virtual fame. But its dark history is an important reminder that when technology is involved with children we shouldn't overlook anything.

Claire de Luna: The Clairvoyant Witch

Claire leads the lineup as a constellation-reading seer. Though blind, she uses her ability to interpret star patterns to guide others. Her doll features star-accented clothing, tinted sunglasses, a cane, a crystal ball for telling the future, and a star guidebook.

Willow Thorne: The Nature Witch

Willow is deeply connected to the Earth, communicating with plants to help them bloom and crafting healing potions. She is hard of hearing and wears a hearing aid. Her earthy accessories include a moth purse for magic herb, herb pouch belt, and plant spell jar.

Rae Lumina: The Sun Witch

Bubbly and energetic, Rae draws power from sunlight to create rainbows and radiate positivity. Her accessories include a sunbeam candle, tasseled bag, and sunshine spellbook. Notably, fans have praised her pink-leaning color palette, highlighting the importance of girly representation for Black dolls.

Carina Song: The Love Witch

Carina channels the magic of friendship and self-love. Known for mixing enchanted perfumes that lift moods, she arrives dressed in soft pink tones with a potion perfume bottle, spellbook, and moonlight mirror.

Layla Stine: The Crystal Witch

Layla uses gemstone energy to create protective jewelry. Styled in jewel tones, she comes with an amethyst hat, invisibility crystal accessory, metallic jacket, and spellbook.

Photo By Mattel

Written by Fatma, Edited by Aminata, Designed by Maryam

Moonspell MAGIC

Mattel has officially unveiled its newest addition the Monster High universe

The Moonspell Magic doll line, a witch-themed collection set for nationwide release in July 2026 at a retail price of about $27. First revealed at the New York Toy Fair, the line introduces a mystical themed doll line with themes of friendship, identity, and self-discovery.

Designed by creative leads Liv, Javier, and Glind, Moonspell Magic has many magical accessories and interactive play. Each doll includes witch essentials like potion bottles, spellbooks, and themed purses, while special cauldrons allow kids to pour in water to reveal hidden amulet necklaces. A surprise element that adds a tactile "magic ritual" component to playtime.

Mattel has confirmed Moonspell Magic will be more than just a doll line. A six-episode animated mini-series (about 8 minutes each) is expected to debut around September 2026, likely on Youtube. This led fans to believe that Mattel is planning on making Moonspell Magic a long-term sub-line within the Monster High world. Many fans praised the doll's humanized designs and diverse representation, especially with the disability inclusion, different body types and varying aesthetics. The magical theme seems fresh while still aligning with Monster High themes. And Rae Lumina's design has been widely loved for expanding representation in color palettes for Black dolls.

But, some longtime fans feel the line isn't "monstrous" enough, arguing it leans too far into early 2010 witch aesthetics rather than the gothic edge they believe it should have. Others note that there are strong visual similarities of past Mattel lines like Cave Club and Ever After High noting the overlapping color schemes and styling. Some theorize that there will be a Bratzillaz return to compete with Moonspell Magic.

Lunar New Year 2026 Barbie

The Lunar New Year Barbie is Mattel's latest signature holiday doll designed by Joyce Chen. This doll was first available in early access on December 15, with a regular release on January 30, and at a price range around $55. Draped in bright red to channel luck and adorned with a gold peony print representing prosperity and honor, the doll's elegant gown features a fan-like bodice inspired by traditional dance fans often fired during the holiday. The look is completed with a sheer golden shawl, bold earrings with traditional Chinese symbology and a long sleek hairstyle, celebrating the Year of the Horse with meaningful cultural design details. Public perception has been largely positive with many fans praising the festive aesthetics and symbolic touches, though some critics have noted concerns about the quality of printed fabrics and materials.

Photo By Mattel

Bratz Angelz Album

"Bratz Angelz" is the latest Bratz album, released on January 30, 2026, marking the iconic girl group's return to music. The album features seven tracks in total, made up of four solo songs (one spotlighting each main character) and the remaining group tracks that lean into the Bratz Angelz's 2000s pop and confidence-heavy sound. Each solo track reflects the individual personality and vibe of its character, while the group songs emphasize friendship, fame, and the fantasy of living the Angelz lifestyle. Public perception has been extremely positive, with fans praising the catchiness of the songs and the nostalgic yet modern production. While some online speculation claimed the vocals were AI-generated, these rumors were quickly dismissed as false.

Photo By Mattel

American Girl: The 2026 Girl of the Year is Raquel Reyes

American Girl's 2026 Girl of the Year is Raquel Reyes, a 10 year-old DJ from Kansas City, Missouri, who is passionate about music, animal rescue, and her family's heritage. Released in early 2026, Raquel is biracial, with a white mother and a father of Mexican heritage, and her family runs a popular paleta shop called Paleta-Palooza. She loves dolphins and caring for animals, and her story focuses on balancing creativity, responsibility, and cultural pride. Raquel is also the first Girl of the Year character to be directly related to a historical character, with Samantha Parkington as her great-great-grandmother. Fan reception has been largely positive, especially praising her biracial representation and celebration of both sides of her background.

Photo By MGA

Autistic Barbie

Released as part of Mattel's ongoing push toward diversity within the Barbie brand, autistic Barbie was released on January 12, 2026 and immediately became one of the most discussed dolls. Developed in collaboration with the Autistic Self Advocacy Network (ASAN), a non-profit organization run by and for autistic people, it took 18 months to make. The doll was designed to reflect sensory awareness and inclusivity rather than a single, fixed portrayal of autism. Details such as softer color palettes, thoughtful outfit textures as people on the spectrum tend to be more sensitive to certain textures, and accessories such as a fidget spinner, noise-cancelling headphones, and Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) device. Other features include flexible joints so she can perform repetitive movements like hand flapping, which helps her regulate stimuli. All these features were meant to emphasize lived experience over stereotypes.

Public response has been largely positive, especially among autistic individuals, parents, and disability advocates who praised Mattel for continuing to expand Barbie's role as a reflection of the real world's diversity. Many highlighted the importance of autistic children seeing themselves represented in a mainstream toy line, not just as a side character, but as Barbie. A confident, visible, and normalized Barbie. Supporters also applauded the doll for avoiding exaggerated traits and instead focusing on subtle design choices. For many families, the doll has been a meaningful step toward normalizing neurodiversity in play and encouraging empathy among children.

Despite the positivity, criticism has centered on the idea that autism is not always a visual condition or disorder, raising concerns that any attempt to "design" autism into a doll risks oversimplification. Some critics argue that assigning identifiable visual cues could unintentionally reinforce the misconception that autism looks the same for everyone, when in reality it exists on a wide and complex spectrum. Others questioned whether a doll can meaningfully represent an internal neurodevelopmental experience at all, expressing their concerns that the well-intentioned representation could slip into a symbolic branding rather than genuine inclusion. Despite the debate, autistic Barbie is an important release within the toy industry allowing children to see themselves or their peers and creativity.

Photos By Mattel

Photo By Mattel

American Girl Doll Modern Doll Controversy

The American Girl franchise has long been known for blending toys with education. Since its founding, the brand's core mission was not just to sell dolls, but to teach young readers about American history through books, carefully researching time periods, and stories on girlhood across different eras. For many families the dolls were educational tools. A way for children to connect with the past, learn about social issues, and see themselves reflected in history. However, the company's recent 40th-anniversary relaunch has sparked significant criticism, with many longtime fans arguing the brand is drifting away from its original purpose.

To celebrate the anniversary, the company reimagined six classic historical characters with updated appearances, new outfits, and redesigned body proportions. Critics say the updated bodies appear slimmer, with heads that look disproportionately large, leading many to describe them as "bobblehead-like" or uncanny. Some fans have even referred to the redesign as an "Ozempic makeover," suggesting the dolls now reflect modern beauty trends rather than realistic childlike proportions.

For a brand historically praised for promoting healthy, age-appropriate representation, this shift has felt especially jarring to longtime collectors. major criticism involves the updated wardrobes. Although the dolls are still canonically around 10 years old, fans argue their new clothing prioritizes modern fashion trends over historical accuracy or character storytelling.

Traditionally, American Girl outfits were designed to reflect each character's time period, social class, and personality. Reinforcing the educational aspect of the brand. By contrast, critics say the new looks feel generic and trend-driven, stripping away the cultural and historical specificity that once defined the line. Lastly, many fans believe that this just fueled American Girl dolls' "cash grabs" especially considering the $90 price tag despite the lack of quality with rooted hair and cheap looking outfits.

K-pop Demon Hunters
Doll Mania

Core Fashion Dolls ($26.99)

The core KPop Demon Hunters fashion doll line features Rumi, Mira, Zoey, and Jinu in their signature looks. Designed for both play and display, these dolls serve as the main entry point into the franchise's toy lineup.

Deluxe Fashion Doll Battle Rumi ($53.99)

Battle Rumi is the premium standout of the line, featuring enhanced articulation, layered costuming, and detailed accessories tied to her demon-hunting gear. Positioned as a collector-forward release, the deluxe doll emphasizes action and character depth.

Singing Fashion Dolls "Golden" Edition ($32.39)

Spotlight Rumi, Mira, and Zoey with interactive sound features and elevated outfits inspired by their on-stage personas. These dolls lean heavily into the music-forward identity of the series.

For the Fans Pack Assortment ($12.95)

The For the Fans Packs offer smaller-scale collectibles and accessories inspired by the KPop Demon Hunters universe, making them an accessible option for casual fans or add-ons for existing collections.

KPop Demon Hunters' x 'American Girl' dolls

American Girl's KPop Demon Hunters collaboration with the animated film "KPop Demon Hunters" marks a major step into pop-culture licensing. The limited-edition 18-inch dolls are now available for pre-order at $165 each and are expected to ship on November 27. One of the most praised aspects of the release is the styling. The dolls feature detailed stage outfits with functional elements such as zippers, chains, layered fabrics, and structured silhouettes with the same outfits worn in the film. Fans who enjoy play-focused dolls have also noted that the line maintains American Girl's usual durability and playability, making it appealing beyond collectors.

However, public perception has been sharply divided. A major point of criticism involves character accuracy and representation. Zoey is widely viewed as the only character who clearly reads as "American," while the other dolls who are Korean characters, use existing American Girl face molds. Many fans argue these generic sculpts fail to reflect East Asian features, with repeated calls for new face molds. Mira, in particular, has been criticized for needing a longer, more angular face shape to better match her animated counterpart.

Concerns about whitewashing have also been prominent in online discussion, with fans stating that the dolls' softened features and facial styling do not accurately reflect Korean characteristics. Phrases like "whose white baby is that" have circulated, capturing frustration over what many see as a lack of cultural specificity. Additional criticism targets the heavy eyeliner and makeup, which some feel does not match with the film's aesthetic and gives the dolls a more generic fashion-doll appearance.

The $165 price has also been a major critique. While premium pricing is standard for American Girl, many fans feel the cost is too high given the reused head molds and perceived lack of innovation. This has led to accusations that the collaboration prioritizes trendy merchandising over the brand's long-standing emphasis on history, education, and quality.

Photos on this spread By Mattel

Hello Friend Mini Reveal Keychains ($6.47)

These mini reveal keychains deliver a blind-box style experience with compact character charms.

6" Action Figures — HUNTR/X & Saja Boys ($21.59)

The 6-inch action figures bring HUNTR/X and the Saja Boys into a more dynamic, poseable format, emphasizing combat stances and stylized detail over realism.

Little People Sets — HUNTR/X & Saja Boys ($19.99 each)

Fisher-Price's Little People adaptations reimagine both groups in a simplified, kid-friendly style, expanding the franchise's reach to younger audiences while maintaining character recognition.

Photos on this page By Mattel

Polly Pocket Tiny Capsules ($5.39)

Polly Pocket joins the crossover lineup with compact playsets inspired by KPop Demon Hunters. For a portable environment and miniature figures designed for quick, imaginative play.

Hot Toys

Hot Toys has entered the KPop Demon Hunters lineup with highly detailed sixth-scale figures aimed squarely at adult collectors. Known for hyper-realistic sculpting, premium tailoring, and screen-accurate accessories, these figures emphasize lifelike facial detail, layered fabric outfits, and intricate weapon designs that closely mirror the film's aesthetic. Early fan response has been largely positive, with collectors praising the craftsmanship and seeing the line as a "serious" artistic interpretation of the characters rather than a play-focused release. However, some fans remain cautious due to Hot Toys' typically high price point and limited availability, questioning whether stylized, animated characters translate as effectively into ultra-realistic formats.

Photo By Funko Pop

Hasbro

Alongside the Monopoly Deal: KPop Demon Hunters card game, now available for $12.99, Hasbro has expanded the franchise with a full KPop Demon Hunters edition of the classic Monopoly board game. The lineup also includes Nerf blasters inspired by the trio's signature demon-hunting weapons (Zoey's Spirit Blades, Rumi's Four Tiger Sword, and Mira's Curved Moon Sword) as well as HUNTR/X and Saja Boys electronic light sticks. Fans can also purchase the KPop Demon Hunters Furby Furblets inspired after fan-favorite characters Derpy Tiger and Demon Jinu.

Photo By Woobles

Photo By Hot Toys

Funko Pop! Figures ($14.99)

Exclusive Pop! vinyl collection featuring Rumi, Mira, Zoey, Jinu, and a glow-in-the-dark Derpy & Sussie figure. Pre-orders are available now.

Photo By Hasbro

Woobles Derpy and Sussie Crochet Kit ($90)

A craft kit allowing fans to create their own KPop Demon Hunters-inspired crochet figures.

Photo By oroo0

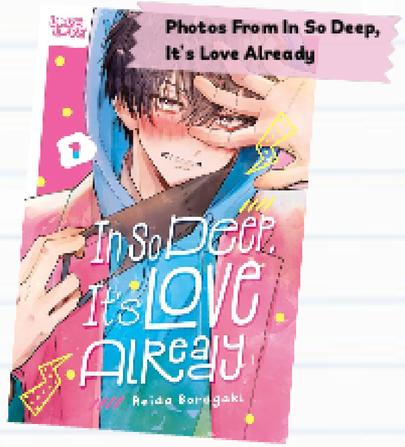
Written by Fatma, Edited by Aminata, Designed by Maryam

High Spirits Neoma
by oroor0

"High Spirits Neoma" is a supernatural webtoon that blends heartfelt emotion with eerie folklore. Originally launched on WEBTOON Canvas before being promoted to Originals, the series has amassed over 5.9 million views. Set in a Spanish-speaking country, the story follows Neoma Cruz, an upbeat, kind Afro-Latina teen who can interact with spirits, as she helps both humans and ghosts while adjusting to a new town. When her family relocates to investigate a surge in cursed spirits, Neoma uncovers a dark family secret that refuses to stay buried. With the help of her new friend Mateo, she must confront the haunting legacy of her past, including a deeply unsettling and hateful grandfather, all while hiding a secret of her own. Praised for its diverse and queer characters, High Spirits Neoma stands out for its realistic portrayal of toxic family dynamics. The Webtoon does not excuse harmful behavior, but shows how victims often cope by forgiving, minimizing, and enduring.

In So Deep, It's Love Already, Vol. 1 by Reida Soragaki

Released on February 3, 2026, "In So Deep, It's Love Already" is a shoujo romantic comedy that blends idol "stan" culture with classic high school rom-com energy. The story follows Momoka Kirino, an otaku fangirl who swears off romance after a painful rejection. That is until a shy new transfer student, Shuuto Kametani, enters her life. Deciding to make him her "oshi (favorite character)," Momoka's fangirl obsession slowly turns into an unconventional and unexpectedly sincere romance as she navigates Shuuto's easily flustered personality. Early reader reception has been positive, with fans praising the playful humor, cute banter, and relatable teen emotions that give the series its charm.



Love at First Memory, Vol. 1 by Narumi Hasegaki

Released on February 10, 2026, "Love at First Memory" is a romance drama manga with reverse-harem elements and a mystery twist. After a car accident leaves heiress Mia Takanashi with complete amnesia, she must determine which of four boys in her life she was originally in love with and possibly engaged to. Each potential suitor represents a different version of her past, from an arranged fiancé to a charming conman-type and a model with hidden depth. Published by Kodansha Comics, the series has been received positively for its character-driven storytelling and emotional tension, though some readers note that the frequent shifting between love interests can feel repetitive.

Hitting Rewind With You by Hanamaru Kira

Released on February 23, 2026, "Hitting Rewind With You" is a soft romantic comedy manga centered on nostalgia, second chances, and quiet emotional growth. The story follows college students Wakaba Kayano and Fumito, who realize they both missed out on a meaningful high school experience and decide to "redo" youth together by revisiting friendships, rivalries, and the possibility of first love. Published by Kodansha America, the series has been praised for its warm tone, gentle humor, and comforting exploration of "what could have been," appealing strongly to fans of slow-burn, feel-good romance.

Hinatsugimura by Aki Shimizu

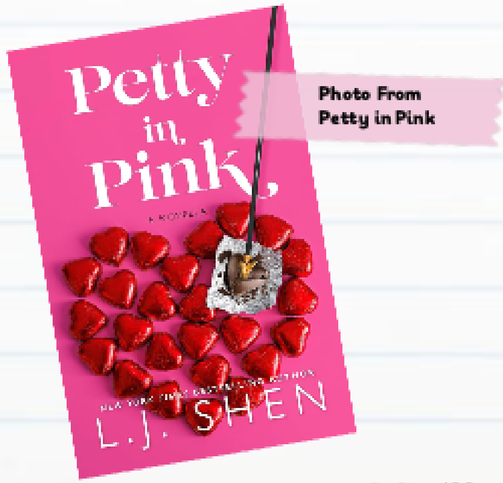
"Hinatsugimura" is a one-shot psychological horror josei manga by Aki Shimizu released on February 10, 2026. The story follows a group of college students who travel deep into the mountains in search of artifacts and ruins, only to become stranded and stumble upon a cursed, forgotten village. There, they encounter a terrifying reality in which outsiders are hunted, killed, and reassembled into dolls. Blending psychological suspense with survival horror, the book has drawn interest for its strong emotional focus and josei-adjacent storytelling style. Early fan reception has been very positive, with readers praising its intense atmosphere and character-driven fear, though some criticism has been directed at the English release for lacking cultural notes that could help contextualize the story's folkloric influences.

And Now, Back to You (Heartstrings, #2) by B.K. Borison

"And Now, Back to You (Heartstrings #2)" is a contemporary romance by B.K. Borison, releasing on February 24, 2026. The novel follows two rival meteorologists forced to work together while covering a major storm, turning professional competition into unexpected intimacy. With sharp banter, opposites-attract tension, and emotional vulnerability, the book has already generated positive early buzz from romance readers who enjoy character-driven love stories with humor and heart.

Petty in Pink by L.J. Shen

"Petty in Pink" by L.J. Shen is a Valentine-themed friends-with-benefits romance novella set in The Devil Wears Black universe. Released on February 3, 2026, the story follows Layla Schmidt, a commitment-averse teacher, and Grant Gerwig, an oncologist who has quietly wanted more from their six-year no-strings arrangement. After an emotionally charged night reignites unresolved feelings, an unplanned pregnancy forces both to confront what they've been avoiding. As Layla reckons with her fear of love and vulnerability, Grant steps fully into the role of devoted partner, turning a casual relationship into something real.



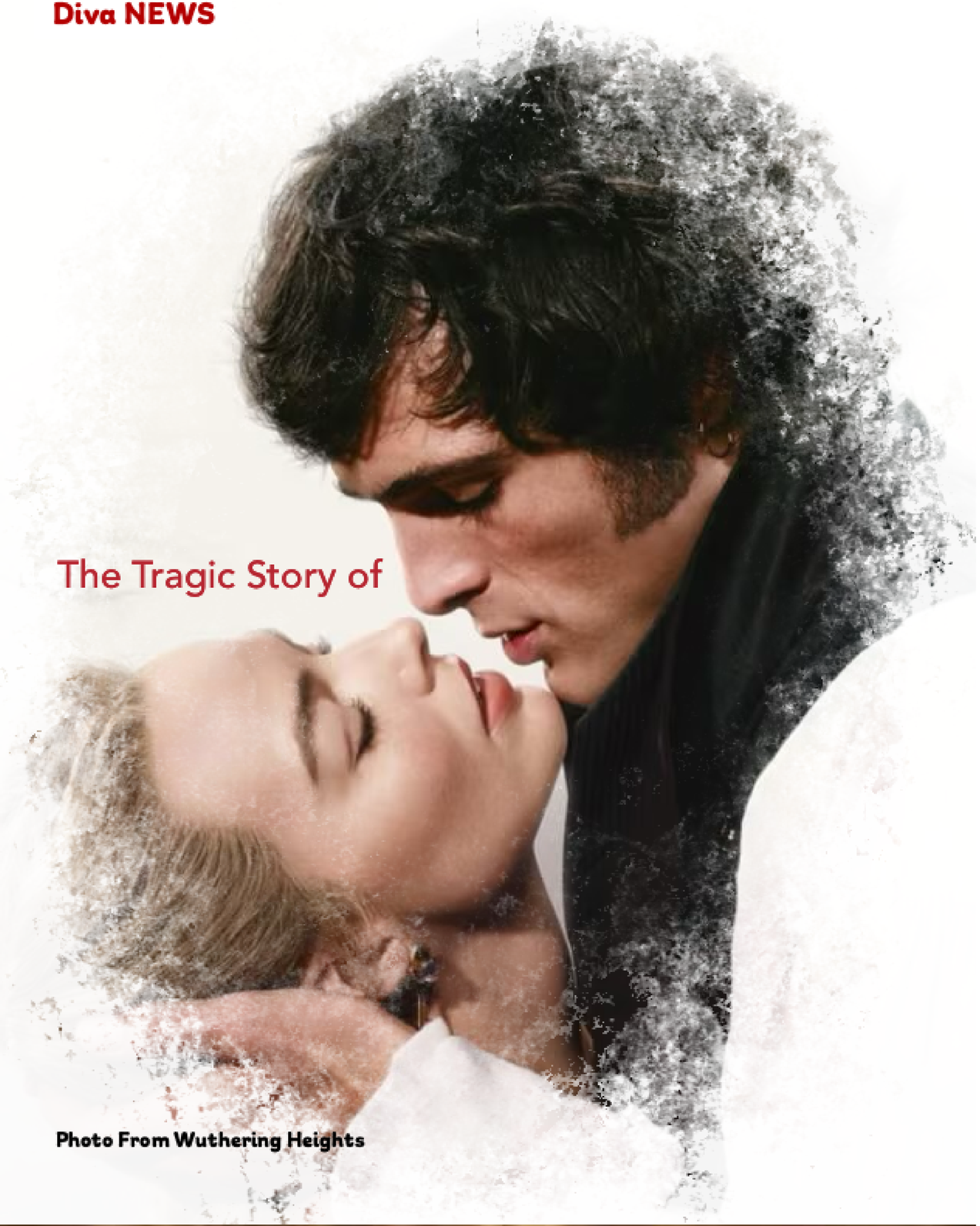


Photo From Wuthering Heights

Written by Fatma, Edited by Aminata, Designed by Maryam

Wuthering Heights

Few novels capture the raw, destructive power of love, revenge, and power structures like "Wuthering Heights" by Emily Brontë. Published in 1847, the story shocked Victorian readers with its emotional intensity, morally complex characters, and its dark, vengeful romance. Rather than a traditional love story, the novel explores love at its most obsessive, toxic, and consuming. Often described as a tale of passion and revenge, "Wuthering Heights" also touches on how pain travels across generations; how jealousy, classism, and unresolved trauma can affect lives long after the original wounds are inflicted.

To better understand the modern adaptations of the story, here is a brief summary of the original novel. "Wuthering Heights" is a multi-generational story of love, cruelty, and revenge centered around two neighboring estates on the Yorkshire moors. The novel begins with the new tenant of Thrushcross Grange, situated on The Bleak Yorkshire Moors, being forced to seek shelter one night at Wuthering Heights, the home of his landlord. During his stay, he learns about the strange and tense relationships within the household. Through the retellings of housekeeper Nelly Dean, he learns the tragic story behind their affairs.

The real story begins years earlier when Mr. Earnshaw brings home an orphaned, dark skinned boy from Liverpool named Heathcliff and raises him alongside his daughter Catherine. Although the two form a deep emotional bond, Heathcliff is treated cruelly by the entire household, especially Hindley Earnshaw (Mr. Earnshaw's son), who resents him. For years, Heathcliff endures torture and torment at the hands of Hidnely. As they grow older, Catherine and Heathcliff develop an intense and inseparable love. However, Catherine ultimately chooses to marry Edgar Linton, a wealthy man with a high social standing, believing that marrying Heathcliff would lower her status.

Heartbroken and humiliated, Heathcliff leaves Wuthering Heights. But years later, he returns, newly wealthy and determined to take revenge on those he believes have wronged him. He marries Edgar's sister out of spite and for her money. He manipulates, controls, and harms not only his enemies, but the next generation, continuing a cycle of suffering. He becomes a toxic, vindictive, and selfish man who would stop at no end to meet his revenge. Catherine dies around the age of 18 shortly after giving birth to her daughter. Devastated after her death, Hathcliff's obsession only deepens, driving him further into bitterness and vengeance. The novel shows the consequences of their destructive love through its effects on their children's lives long after both of their deaths.

Today, "Wuthering Heights" is considered one of the greatest Gothic novels to come out of the nineteenth century. It contributed to a shift of cultural authority in Britain from the upper to the middle class, and even to the lower-middle class by challenging traditional class structures and exploring the darker aspects of Victorian society. Furthermore, it portrays emotional and social isolation, all-consuming revenge, and love that is passionate but deeply destructive. Cultural difference and social degeneration or exclusion are indeed the real drive of the entire narrative of "Wuthering Heights." The story has kept the interest of audiences across several film and television adaptations. So, why has Emerald Fennell's "Wuthering Heights"—or should I say "Withering Whites"—received so much backlash?

Photo By Alexandra Arnold

The Casting Tea

Emerald Fennell – The Mastermind

Director Emerald Fennell has built a reputation for stylized storytelling, captivating cinematography, morally ambiguous characters, and provocative themes through films like "Promising Young Woman" and "Saltburn." Both projects were produced by LuckyChap Entertainment, the female-led production company founded by Margot Robbie, Tom Ackerley, Josey McNamara, and Sopie Kerr in 2014. This company was made to focus on female leads and to produce unconventional stories by and about women. LuckyChap Entertainment also produced films like "I, Tonya," "Barbie," and "Birds of Prey" with Margot Robbie not only being a major part of these productions, but starring in several.

However, "Wuthering Heights" marks Fennell's first time adapting an established literary classic and that shift has sparked intense debate. Many fans of this gothic classic expressed their concerns on how Emerald Fennell will "completely Saltburn-ify one of the greatest, most gloriously batshit, Gothic masterpieces to ever haunt the Yorkshire Moors." Many fans fear that her signature polished and provocative style would clash with the raw, haunting tone of Wuthering Heights, with critics worrying the adaption may be too polished, too Hollywood, and too "Saltburn" for a story that grittily explores brutality, pain, and emotional ambiguity

Photo By Taylor Hill

Margot Robbie

as Catherine Earnshaw

Margot Robbie's casting as Catherine has been one of the most discussed decisions. In the novel, Catherine is described with brown hair, dark brown eyes, wearing simple clothes, and wearing proper lady clothes. All these are meant to contrast that of the distinguished civilized Lintons with their blonde hair and blue eyes. Especially when the story progresses and their children grow up. Cathy Linton, Catherine and Edgar Linton's daughter is blond which is supposed to indicate Edgar's influence in her DNA and is supposed to show how different Cathy is from Catherine. The fairness or the lack thereof is meant to be an important device to comment on classism, social hierarchy, and Eurocentric beauty standards and how they intersect. And we completely lost that when Fennell casted Margot Robbie.

Critics argue that Robbie's blond, sharp/dramatic botoxed features and polished image disrupts the visuals. She does not have the innocent features required for a timeless period drama. And in my opinion, she doesn't look British. Additionally, Catherine dies in her late teens, meaning the role requires embodying adolescent impulsiveness, volatility, and youthful intensity. At 35, despite her beauty and captivity, some fans question whether Robbie can convincingly portray a 15 year old or the emotional recklessness central to Catherine's character. Beyond physical differences, some viewers feel her established screen persona didn't match Catherine. Robbie is confident, glamorous, and composed, while Catherine is supposed to be childish, carefree, selfish, and arrogant because she is a teenager.

Jacob Elordi

as Heathcliff

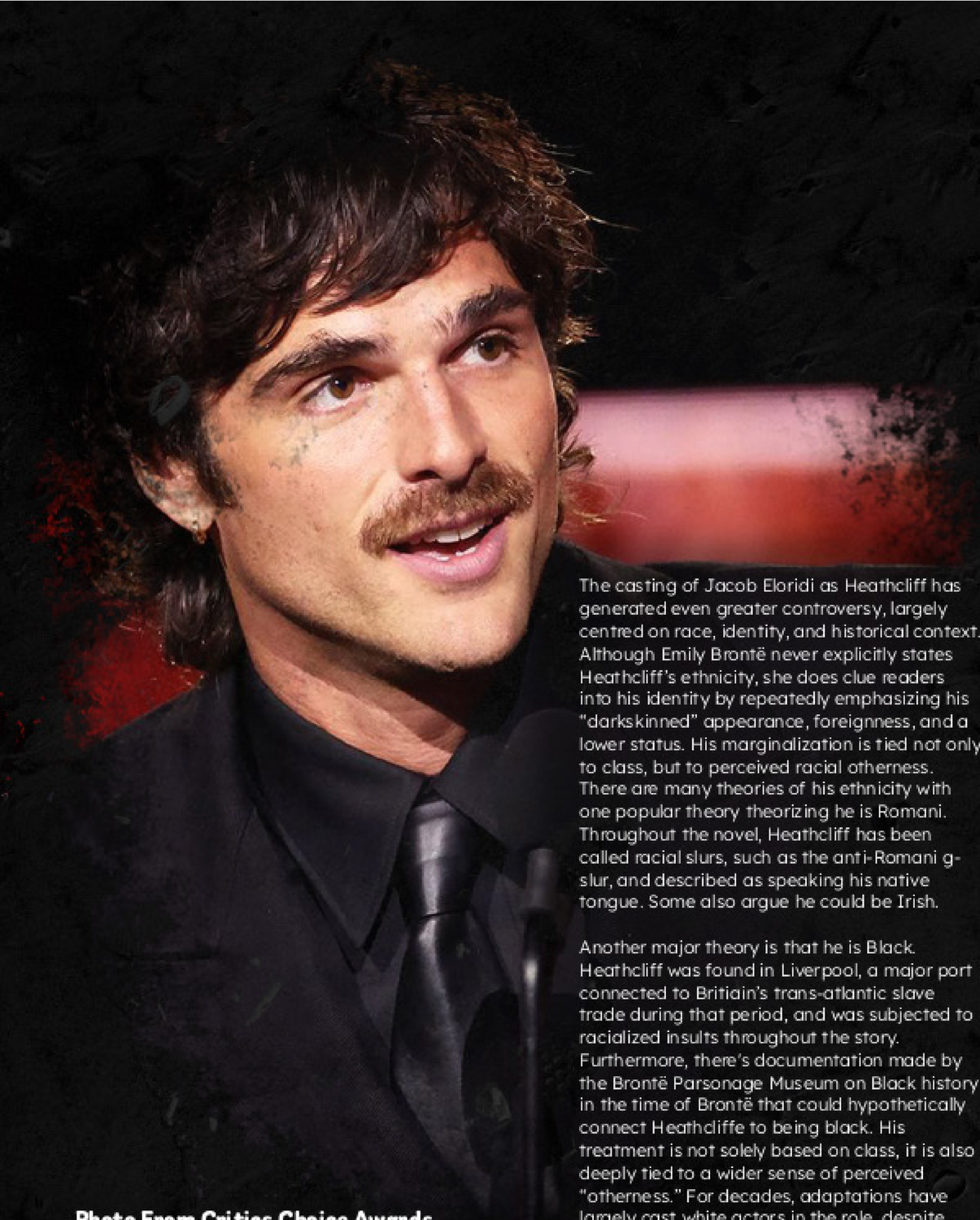


Photo From Critics Choice Awards

The casting of Jacob Eloridi as Heathcliff has generated even greater controversy, largely centred on race, identity, and historical context. Although Emily Brontë never explicitly states Heathcliff's ethnicity, she does clue readers into his identity by repeatedly emphasizing his "darkskinned" appearance, foreignness, and a lower status. His marginalization is tied not only to class, but to perceived racial otherness. There are many theories of his ethnicity with one popular theory theorizing he is Romani. Throughout the novel, Heathcliff has been called racial slurs, such as the anti-Romani g-slur, and described as speaking his native tongue. Some also argue he could be Irish.

Another major theory is that he is Black. Heathcliff was found in Liverpool, a major port connected to Britiain's trans-atlantic slave trade during that period, and was subjected to racialized insults throughout the story. Furthermore, there's documentation made by the Brontë Parsonage Museum on Black history in the time of Brontë that could hypothetically connect Heathcliffe to being black. His treatment is not solely based on class, it is also deeply tied to a wider sense of perceived "otherness." For decades, adaptations have largely cast white actors in the role, despite textual evidence against this. It is clear the real reason why he is mistreated is because he is "different. To date, only the 2011 film adaptation casted a non-white actor. Things are different now, and there is a capability of representing diversity in art and culture that wasn't there 20 years ago. Critics argue that casting Elordi continues a long pattern of erasing Heathcliff's racial identity, which is a key aspect of his marginalization.

Beyond identity debates, critics also highlight concerns about characterization. In the novel, Heathcliff's eventual wealth is gained through manipulation, secrecy, and calculated revenge which allows him to surpass those who once oppressed him. Some fear that casting an actor known for conventional attractiveness risks romanticizing the character, potentially allowing people to overlook the toxicity of his character and further softening his cruelty and moral darkness rather than emphasizing his emotional volatility and social alienation. Age has also been a point of criticism. Elordi, who is 28, is significantly older than Heathcliff during much of the story's early timeline, much like his co-star. Since the character begins as a youth and grows into adulthood shaped by trauma, some viewers worry this casting may weaken the sense of vulnerability important to the plot.

Director Emerald Fennell has openly stated that her interpretation is intentionally subjective, describing the film as an imaginative vision inspired by how she pictured the book when she first read it... at the age of 14. She even noted that Elordi resembled an illustration from her first copy of the novel, which made it a personal connection that influenced her decision. She said "He looked exactly like the illustration of Heathcliffe in the first book that I read. I wanted to scream when I noticed the resemblance. Not the professional thing to do, obviously." But, in my opinion, this approach prioritizes aesthetic nostalgia over historical accuracy. And even if Fennell wanted to create her own story, her casting decisions just proves that she doesn't see people of color as love interests.

At the same time, the debate is not all one-sided. Some critics acknowledge that casting a person of color could also present difficult optics. This is especially considering how Heathcliff was seen as a "pet" within the Earnshaw household, a dynamic that could appear especially disturbing when viewed through a modern racial lens. Others argue that his race is not important because the core of the story is based on class, not a commentary on race. The arguments that Healthcliff could maintain his cultural implications and unique character while portrayed as a white character who experiences classism and racialized discrimination are plausible. The standard of racial otherness was wider in the time period of the novel, often extending to groups considered racially white today. . But if you ask me, race definitely has a large impact on the whole plot of the novel. Taking away his identity risks losing his main motives for revenge. And while no one in the book says he is white, his experience is that of a person of color.

Another recurring criticism is that Heathcliff's emotional range may not be fully explored, with some viewers feeling the portrayal risks flattening his complexity into brooding attractiveness rather than conveying the depth of his trauma, obsession, and rage. Some fans even suggested alternative casting choices, such as Evan Peters who most people think fit the description of a timeless period drama actor.

Photo From Wuthering Heights

Shazad Latif

as Edgar Linton

The casting of Shazad Latif, who is of Pakistani, English, and Scottish heritage, as Edgar Linton has sparked complicated controversies about representations and narrative roles. On one hand, many viewers welcomed the inclusion of a diverse actor in a major period adaption. However, others noted a concerning pattern... When actors of color are included, they are often placed in antagonistic or obstructive roles within traditionally white literary narratives.

Edgar, while not a villain in the traditional sense, is Heathcliff's main rival and the epitome of class hierarchy. As mentioned previously, the Linton's fair features in the novel function as a symbol of status and proximity to the Eurocentric ideal and by changing that removes one of the greatest causes of trauma. Some critics argue that casting a person of color in this role unintentionally shifts the story's dynamics and transforms the narrative originally focused on class oppression and racialized "otherness" into one where the person of the highest social standard and one of the characters who essentially bully Heathcliff is portrayed by a person of color.

This creates a historically inaccurate imbalance. The character written as an outsider (Heathcliff) remains played by a white actor, while a character representing privilege and social hierarchy is portrayed by a person of color.

Photo By Billy Kidd

Hong Chau

as Nelly Dean

Even more controversy surrounds Hong Chau's casting as Nelly Dean. In the novel, Nelly is not simply a servant, she is the primary narrator and moral observer of the story. Much of the book is filtered through her perspective as she recounts events to Mr. Lockwood, effectively guiding the audience's understanding of the characters and their motivations. However, critics argue that the film adaptation significantly alters this role in ways that cause serious misunderstandings and misinterpretations. By casting the only major person of color in the story as the household servant and then reshaping the plot to assign her greater blame for the central tragedy, the adaptation risks reinforcing harmful stereotypes.

In the novel, Heathcliff overhears only part of Catherine's confession by chance, leading to his devastating misunderstanding. In the film, however, this moment was twisted with Nelly deliberately questioning Catherine while noticing Heathcliff approaching, ensuring he hears Caherine's hurtful words. This change shifts the responsibility away from Catherine's own cruelty and blames the separation on Nelly's actions. Critics believe that a majority of the film is trying to make viewers against Nelly despite her having a crucial role for both main characters. Not to mention, the reason why Nelly lashed out in this way is because Catherine said something extremely viscous and mean spirited that was along the lines of 'no one loves you.'

Critics argue this change is especially problematic because it ignores the class and power imbalance between Catherine and Nelly. In the novel, Nelly occupies a precarious social position. She is close enough to the family to witness and be involved in their lives, but never truly their equal. She has to navigate a world where she has little authority, limited freedom, and constant emotional violation from those above her in status. By reframing her as an intentional instigator, the adaption risks simplifying a complex character into a scapegoat and not acknowledging any power imbalance. Given the racial casting, some viewers feel it unintentionally reinforces the trope of blaming marginalized figures for conflicts created by those in power.

Photo By Matt Baron/Mei

Crazy PR Tactics

One of the most widely criticized aspects of the film was not just its creative choices, but its questionable marketing campaign surrounding it. But what exactly outraged fans?

Photo From Wuthering Heights

The Trailer

From the moment the official trailer dropped, audiences quickly noticed a disconnect between the source material and how the movie was being sold. Rather than emphasizing the novel's central themes (class conflict, cruelty, generational trauma, and destructive obsession) the trailer framed the story almost entirely as a sweeping, sensual romance. Many fans described the marketing as reducing a deeply tragic gothic story into what seemed to be smut-filled "slop."

Promotion

Audiences were confronted not just with a film, but with a marketing campaign that prioritized spectacle over substance. Critics and fans quickly noticed that the promotion focused less on the novel's gothic, emotional, and morally complex story, and more on the perceived chemistry and interactions between its stars, Margot Robbie and Jacob Elordi. The promotion repeatedly depicted the story as simply "the greatest love story of all time," completely ignoring the rest of the themes and making it into a marketable romance tagline. They made reels and tiktoks constantly romanticizing this film and promising it to be an iconic love story using many tropes to rope in viewers.

The Press Tour and the "Affair Baiting"

The shift became even more apparent during the press tour, which leaned heavily into what many viewers described as "affairbaiting." They deliberately framed the lead actors as romantically entangled to generate buzz. Across interviews, social media clips, and press appearances, the campaign leaned heavily less on the film itself and more on the dynamic and the illusion of romance between its two stars, Margot Robbie and Jacob Elordi despite both being publicly in relationships

And while this is common, people noted how odd it was as Robbie's husband is the film's executive producer, raising questions about the degree to which personal connections influenced the promotional focus. On platforms like twitter, viewers quickly picked up on what they pierced as forced chemistry. Clips and photos circulated showing the baited prolonged eye contact, lingering touches, and exaggerated praise during interviews. Many interpreted this as not as genuine connection, but as carefully staged meant to blur the lines between character and actor.

Interview Moments

The interviews often pushed this narrative further. In one press interview, Robbie joked that Elordi would make "a very good boyfriend," while describing how she became so used to his presence watching her perform that she felt unsettled when he wasn't nearby and eventually becoming "clingy" or "codependent." Elordi also spoke about being "mesmerized" by watching her act, saying he paid attention to "how she eats, drinks, breathes." During Valentine's day, Robbie described how Wlordi filled her room with roses (except he did it while "in character" as Heathcliff). Online audiences interpreted these moments as reinforcing a narrative of mutual obsession rather than professional collaboration, with some viewers seeing it as a clearly scripted PR behavior.

Photoshoots/Vogue Spread

Photoshoots further reinforced this narrative. A major feature in Vogue framed the film almost entirely through the actor's dynamic rather than its themes, using phrases like "pure obsession" and intimate poses. Critics argued that this approach continued the pattern of prioritizing celebrity spectacles over the literary context.

Merch

Controversy also extended to the film's promotional merchandise, particularly items distributed to members of the press. One example was a sewing needlework kit due to the fact embroidery is a hobby quite common during the time period. But, others viewed it as a reference to a self-harm moment in the novel, a choice many critics found disturbingly tone-deaf. In the novel, when Catherine and Isabel have a falling out because of Heathcliff, Isabel threatens to hurt herself with a sewing needle. This is extremely insensitive and many were offended. Other merchandise such as a stationary theme caused debate as some say that it is insensitive (due to the fact in the film Heathcliff does not know how to read) and say it represents a power imbalance and mockery. There is more merchandise available to the general public such as apparel, candles, and perfumes. But one specific merchandise caused debates: "Wuthering Heights" x Quickies. Quickies is a sustainable women owned press-on nail company based in Canada. In their promotion, there was suggestive advertising imagery. While many appreciated the beautiful nail art, others further argue that these types of promotional content sexualizes the film further.

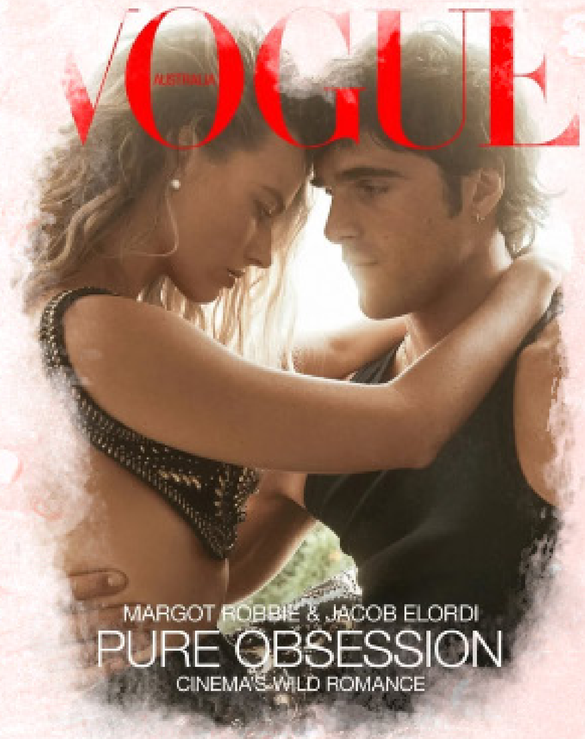


Photo From Vogue

Photo From Wuthering Heights

An Old Tale a Plastic Look

From the moment the first set photos leaked, one of the loudest criticisms surrounding Emerald Fennell's "Wuthering Heights" was not the casting, but the film's overall aesthetic. For a story rooted in harsh landscapes, decaying homes, and dark tones, many viewers felt the production design looked strangely artificial, glossy, and even cheap.

Costume designer Jacqueline Durran openly acknowledged this intention, explaining that the film was never meant to represent a specific historical period. Instead, she described the visual approach as deliberately "incorrect for the time — shiny, sparkly, and overdone," with styles chosen based on emotional symbolism rather than historical realism. The creative team repeatedly emphasized that the film was envisioned as a "fantastical fever dream," blending gothic imagery with modern glamor.

However, this stylized vision quickly became one of the project's biggest controversies.

The Wedding Dress Discourse

The backlash intensified when paparazzi photos leaked of Margot Robbie in Catherine Earnshaw's wedding dress. Critics immediately noted that the gown's off the shoulder silhouette resembled 1980s bridal fashion. Some even drew comparisons to Princess Diana's iconic wedding dress, rather than anything from the late 18th-century setting of the novel.

Beyond the color, which also sparked debate since white wedding dresses did not become popular until decades later, the construction details were widely criticized by historical fashion experts. The visible crinoline cage beneath the dress was particularly controversial, as crinolines were not invented until the 1950s... long after the story's timeline. Many critiques noted that if it were to be historically accurate, there would've been more layered petticoats. The neckline, sleeve structure, and overall tailoring all appeared distinctly modern, reinforcing the perception that the film prioritized aesthetic spectacle over historical authenticity.

Cheap Costume Design & Character Design

The audience also criticized what they described as visibly low-quality production elements despite the film's reported $18 million budget.

Common complaints included:

- Unconvincing wigs, particular for Heathcliff and young Catherine.

- Cheap "Shein-looking" jewelry that lacked period detail.

- Plastic appearing set decorations that looked finicky.

- Modern looking fabrics with synthetic sheen.

Many viewers felt these choices clashed with the novel's gothic era aesthetic making the world feel more like a theatrical set than an authentic retelling.

Aesthetic Symbolism vs. Authenticity

Despite the backlash, the production team defended their creative direction. Rather than recreating an authentic retelling, they aimed for what the designers called an "accuracy of feeling." Costumes were meant to function psychologically, reflecting power, repression, and emotional states instead of strict historical timelines.

For example, Catherine's wardrobe shifts visually mirror her internal conflict between social ambition and wild passion, while Heathcliff's darker clothing reinforces his growing isolation and menace. Latex-like textures and bold colors were intentionally used to create an unnatural sheen, symbolizing emotional suffocation and obsession.

The Set Design

The film's set design is something critics acknowledged as a striking success. Particularly the visual contrast between the two estates. Wuthering Heights sits on a desolate hill where the wind never seems to stop blowing. True to its name, it's hard, cold, and visibly "bruised," with nature constantly invading on the structure itself. The house is battered as though it has absorbed decades of emotional violence into its walls. This is where Catherine and Heathcliff form their earliest bonds. Not a home meant to be lived in, but survived.

Thrushcross Grange, by contrast, feels almost unreal. When Catherine first leaves Wuthering Heights and enters the Grange, the shift is immediate and overwhelming. The world turns "technicolor." The house bursts with color, texture, and light. With drapes made of cellophane, glossy surfaces, and layered textures, one critic mentioned, the house resembles a jewelry box: beautiful, ornate, and intoxicating.

But despite its beauty, Thrushcross Grange is far from comforting. The house is alive in an unsettling way. Gothic imagery is scattered across the interiors, particularly through the recurring motif of body parts. Hand-shaped candleholders line the walls of the library, while a wave of plaster hands emerges from the fireplace, crawling upward as if the house itself is grasping for control. These hands, molded from the film crew, appear everywhere. From the ceiling roses to sculptural details, it creates a subconscious feel of unease.

The hands suggest possession, surveillance, and the idea that everyone has their hands on everyone else. The body symbolism reached its most disturbing point in Catherine's bedroom. The walls are designed to look exactly like her skin. Veins, moles, and texture are visible, created by printing an image of Margot Robbie's arm onto fabric and stretching latex over it. In the film's final overhead shot, even the carpet reveals veins, as though the room itself is an extension of Catherine's body. The house does not just contain her, it consumes her. In one scene, tiny prop leeches cling not only to the walls but to Catherine herself. Sweat pours from the walls. The house breathes, pulses, and feeds.

Rather than leaning into Catherine's ghost as many adaptations do, the film fixates on the physical body. Its confinement, its decay, and its obsession. Both houses feel haunted, but in different ways. Wuthering Heights is haunted by absence, coldness, and emotional deprivation. Thrushcross Grange is haunted by excess, desire, and suffocation. Together, they externalize Catherine's internal conflict: the wildness she comes from versus the polished prison she chooses.

Photos on this spread From Wuthering Heights

Book vs Film

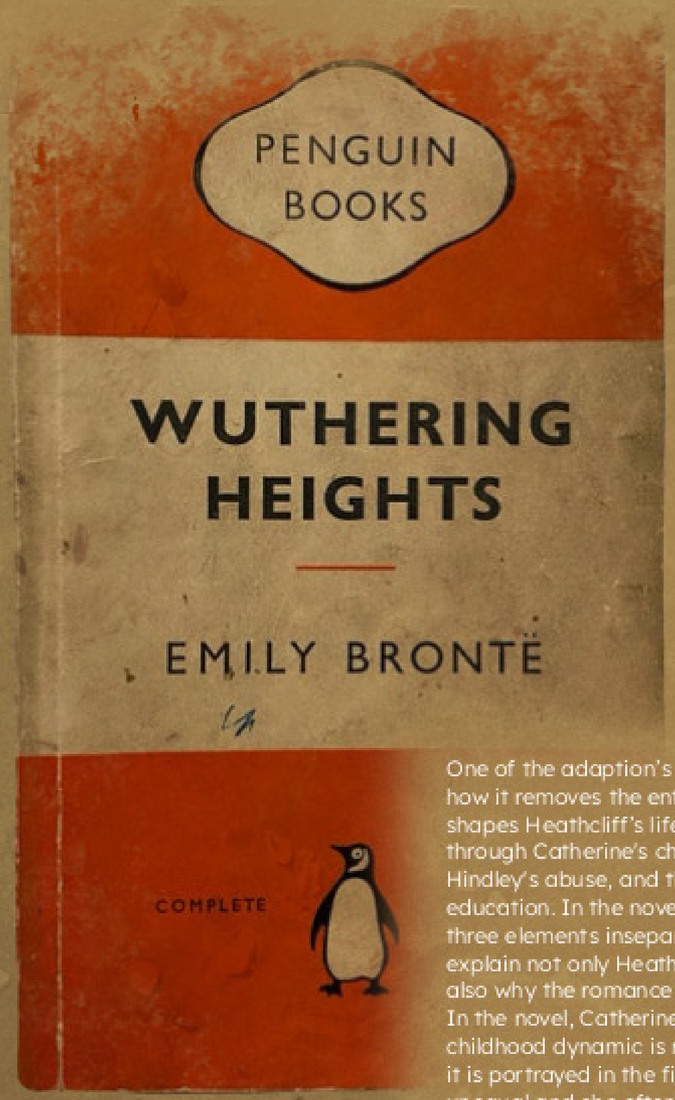


Photo From Wuthering Heights Novel Cover

The Missing Power Structures

One of the adaption's biggest weaknesses is how it removes the entire power structure that shapes Heathcliff's life. A structure built through Catherine's childhood dominance, Hindley's abuse, and the weaponization of education. In the novel, Brontë makes these three elements inseparable. Together, they explain not only Heathcliff's personality but also why the romance becomes so destructive. In the novel, Catherine and Heathcliff's childhood dynamic is not gentle or innocent as it is portrayed in the film. It is extremely unequal and she often abuses her power. Catherine often bullies, humiliates, and controls Heathcliff, despite being "spiritually connected" to him.

She teaches him to read but mocks when he struggles. She reinforces his lower status and enjoys her social superiority by repeatedly reminding him of his lower status. Their bond is built on a contradiction: emotional connection mixed with constant humiliation. When she said "it would degrade me to marry Heathcliff," she revealed the brutal class reality at the core of their relationship. Catherine loves him emotionally, but because of social standings, she can't love him socially. This imbalance is essential because it explains Heathcliff's lifelong obsession. He does not love Catherine simply as a romantic partner. He is psychologically tethered to her as a person. The film removes most of this cruelty, portraying their childhood as mostly soft and affectionate. Without young Catherine's power imbalance, Heathcliff's later fixation appears irrational rather than a psychological response.

Hindley, Catherine's brother, is arguably the most important missing character in the adaptation. In the novel, he is one of the major characters responsible for Heathcliff's suffering. When Mr. Earnshaw brings young Heathcliff home, Catherine initially accepts him almost like a curiosity or "pet," but Hindley immediately resents him. After Mr. Earnshaw, the patriarch of the Earnshaw family, dies, Hindley becomes the patriarch and strips Heathcliff of status, forces him into manual labor, denies him education, and subjects him to years of emotional and physical abuse. This treatment is not incidental.Brontë purposely wrote this as it systemically pushes Heathcliff into a permanent lower class position and results in years of structural oppression. This prolonged oppression explains why when Heathcliff reaches adulthood he is resentful of class, vengeful, and inflicts emotional and physical brutality on others.

Without Hindley's presence, the film removes the main cause of Heathcliff's tragic backstory. His cruelty in adulthood no longer feels like the result of systemic trauma but an unexplained bitterness. Instead, it reintroduces the idea that Catherine named Heathcliff after a dead brother, which replaces systemic abuse with a sentimental backstory. This change erases the social forces that make Heathcliff's adult cruelty psychologically believable. As mentioned before, education is one of the novel's most powerful themes because it functions as a tool of social control. Literacy is not just knowledge it determines status, mobility and power. Initially, Heathcliff is given access to education alongside Catherine. But once Hindley becomes patriarch, he deliberately cuts Heathcliff off from learning. This act permanently traps him in his lower class position and symbolizes his total social exclusion.

This deprivation shapes Heathcliff's worldview. As an adult, he repeats the cycle by preventing Hareton, Hindley's son, from being educated. He even threatens a teacher to ensure Hareton remains illiterate, mirroring exactly what was done to him. This demonstrates how oppression reproduces itself across generations. The film reduces this complex theme into a much simpler detail: Heathcliff appears illiterate and forces Isabella or Nelly to write letters for him. This change removes the deeper commentary about denial of education as a deliberate instrument of class violence.

In the novel, all these elements worked together to create the psychological conditions that produce Heathcliff's obsessive love and vengeful adulthood and repeating the cycle across generations. By removing or softening the three elements, the film does not just change individual plot details, it dismantles the entire social and emotional framework that makes the story meaningful. What remains is a romance stripped out of its historical context, psychological depth, and tragic inevitability.

Photo By Robert McGinnis

The Missing Historical Context of Catherine's Marriage

In the novel, Catherine's decision to marry Edgar is one done out of necessity due to the historical period. A woman whose family loses its fortune has no means of survival without marrying into wealth.

This context explains why Heathcliff's resentment for Edgar is sort of justified with Catherine's choice not being a betrayal but social necessity.

The film fails to meaningfully explore this context. Catherine's motivations remain underdeveloped and the characters rarely engage in dialogue that gives their relationship depth. As a result, Heathcliff's resentment lacks justification, Catherine's decisions feel shallow rather than constrained by social reality and their love lacks a clear foundation

Oversexualization & Treatment of Isabella

Another major point of criticism involves the film's sexualization of Isabella Linton.

In the novel, Isabella is a victim of severe domestic abuse who eventually escapes Heathcliff, retaining agency despite her suffering. Her story reinforces the novel's themes of violence and trauma.

In the film's adaptation however, Isabella's relationship with him is reframed within a BDSM-esque dynamic. She is depicted as willingly participating in her own degradation, changing her story of abuse into something eroticized.

Not only that she is portrayed as childlike throughout the film with ribbons in her hair and occasionally childlike behavior. Critics strongly despised this romanticization and infantilization of Isabella.

Critics argue this portrayal alters the character's original purpose. Rather than exposing Heathcliff's brutality, the film changes it to romantic abuse and undermines the novel's core message.

The "Reader Projection" Theory

Some viewers have proposed a theory that the film is intentionally not a faithful adaptation but rather a meta reinterpretation, imagining the story from the perspective of a modern reader who romanticizes Heathcliff. This theory started out because of the quotient marks around the films title and Emerald confirming she is taking creative liberty with the novel.

In this interpretation, Catherine represents a self-insert fantasy figure and Heathcliff is softened into an idealized romantic archetype. The darker social and psychological elements are removed because they conflict with modern romantic expectations.

If this theory is true, the film functions not as a retelling but as a reimagination shaped by a "smut-ified" audience; essentially asking what the story looks like when filtered through the minds of readers who "think Heathcliff is hot" rather than confront his brutality.

However, this remains speculation and the film itself does not clearly frame this interpretation.

Photo From Wuthering Heights

Photo By Chris Delmas

The Charli XCX
Soundtrack Controversy

The announcement that Charli XCX would create the film's soundtrack was met with immediate skepticism. For many, the pairing felt jarring on paper. A hyper-pop artist writing music for a gothic, 19-century story? It sounded absurd. Critics questioned whether the music could align with the bleak emotional landscape of "Wuthering Heights."

Once the music was released, reactions became more polarized. While the controversy never fully disappeared, many listeners acknowledged that the soundtrack was far more thoughtful and darker than they initially expected. Rather than producing pop songs, Charli leaned into an eerie vibe and blended strings with distorted electronic sounds. The result was something beautiful, music with emotional depth and an "uncanny valley" effect. One common sentiment was that the music felt like pop filtered through horror. Beautiful on the surface with unease underneath.

A standout point in discussions was the track "House," frequently cited as the clearest example of the soundtrack's gothic potential. Listeners praised its anxious, almost strained vocal processing, which conveyed anguish rarely heard in mainstream songs.

A major point of debate surrounded the idea of whether modern music could coexist with a historical setting. Some viewers felt the contrast pulled them out of the story arguing the production clashed with the film's supposed time period. Others, however, believed the music worked in the film's favor. Because this adaption already positions itself as a "fantasy of a fantasy" rather than a strict historical recreation, the soundtrack's modernity reinforced the dream-like and fantasy tone. In certain scenes (like those emphasizing obsession, anxiety or psychological turmoil), the music was widely praised for increasing emotional intensity rather than distracting from it.

Interestingly, some critics argued the soundtrack might have been even more effective in a more faithful adaptation of the novel. They suggested that its horror-tinged atmosphere and emotional vulnerability aligned closely with the book's psychological darkness, even if the film itself did not always capture that tone. Others noted that expectations played a major role in the initial backlash: audiences anticipating a conventional Charli XCX album were often disappointed, while those approaching it as an experimental film score were more receptive.

Botox in the Moors

Photo From Wuthering Heights

A major point of criticism surrounding the adaption has been casting and performances, with many viewers arguing that the actors feel visibly too modern for a 19th-century gothic tragedy. With Margot's bleach blond hair and botox, and Jacob's modern body, viewers felt unsettled watching the novel come to life. Instead of the viewers being swept away into the historical setting, the performances often remind audiences they are watching modern celebrities in costume. This creates a sense of artificiality that clashes with viewers.

Perhaps the most widely discussed issue is the absence of believable sexual and romantic chemistry between the two leads. The relationship between Catherine and Heathcliff is supposed to feel obsessive and emotionally consuming. In the novel, their bond is intense enough to sort of justify Heathcliff's lifelong revenge and psychological fixation. Not to mention, the promotion of this film advertised this chemistry. However, many viewers felt that the film's performances failed to communicate this intensity. Their interactions rarely convey emotional urgency, their physical closeness feels like staged smut rather than natural, and most scenes lack emotional depth. One of the most criticized moments is when Heathcliff returns after leaving to make his fortune and finally expresses his feelings. This scene should have been emotionally climactic yet viewers frequently described it as unconvincing. Jacob Elordi's performance in particular was often described as visually uncomfortable, with restrained body language and limited emotional variation. Instead of portraying obsessive longing, his performance sometimes came across as hesitant or detached. As a result, the performance felt underwhelming compared to Margot Robbie who was able to provide more emotional range.

Accents became another major source of criticism. Many viewers noted that the performances lacked convincing Yorkshire dialects, which some say is essential for the story's social context. Margot Robbie's accent was especially singled out as inconsistent, shifting between regional attempts and more neutral modern speech patterns. Some critics even argued that the casting should have prioritized actors from Yorkshire or those with stronger dialect training, since accent authenticity plays a key role in communicating class distinctions within the story.

Another notable accent critique involves Heathcliff's return after gaining wealth. In the narrative, Heathcliff leaves after overhearing Catherine say that marrying him would degrade her socially. He later returns as a wealthy, powerful man who has supposedly spent years navigating higher social circles. Yet in the film, his accent remains unchanged. This undermines the realism of his transformation. From a historical perspective, acquiring wealth and moving among elite society would likely influence speech patterns. A shift toward a more refined accent could have visually and audibly reinforced his social ascent. By keeping his speech unchanged, the film weakens the sense that he has truly moved between the different classes. His transformation becomes aesthetic rather than social.

One performance that did receive consistent praise, however, was that of Alison Oliver. Many viewers noted that she brought a level of emotional authenticity that felt noticeably stronger than much of the surrounding cast. Her delivery was often described as natural, restrained, and grounded in the historical setting, which helped her scenes feel more believable and immersive. Unlike some of the leads, she appeared fully embedded in the world of the story. Both in her accent work and in her physical mannerisms. Critics also pointed out that her performance carried a subtle emotional depth, conveying internal conflict without overacting, which aligned well with the novel's tone of quiet tension and psychological complexity. As a result, she is frequently cited as one of the film's strongest elements and a standout within an otherwise uneven acting landscape.

Another aspect that many viewers agreed was genuinely strong was the film's opening quarter, particularly the performances of the child actors portraying young Catherine and Heathcliff. Their acting was widely praised for its emotional intensity and authenticity, with many noting that these early scenes felt the most like a true period piece. The children convincingly captured the raw, complicated bond between the characters. It was less a traditional innocent friendship and more what some viewers described as a trauma bond formed through shared isolation, neglect, and emotional instability. Their dynamic conveyed a believable mix of cruelty, dependence, jealousy, and attachment that helped ground the story in psychological realism. Visually and tonally, these early sequences also aligned more closely with the novel's atmosphere, making the later tonal shift with the adult characters feel even more jarring by comparison.

So Diva!

Presents...

The Diva! Strip

TREAT me Nice < 3

"SHHHSSP"

LOVE IT I LOVE IT I LOVE IT I LOVE
WOAH-

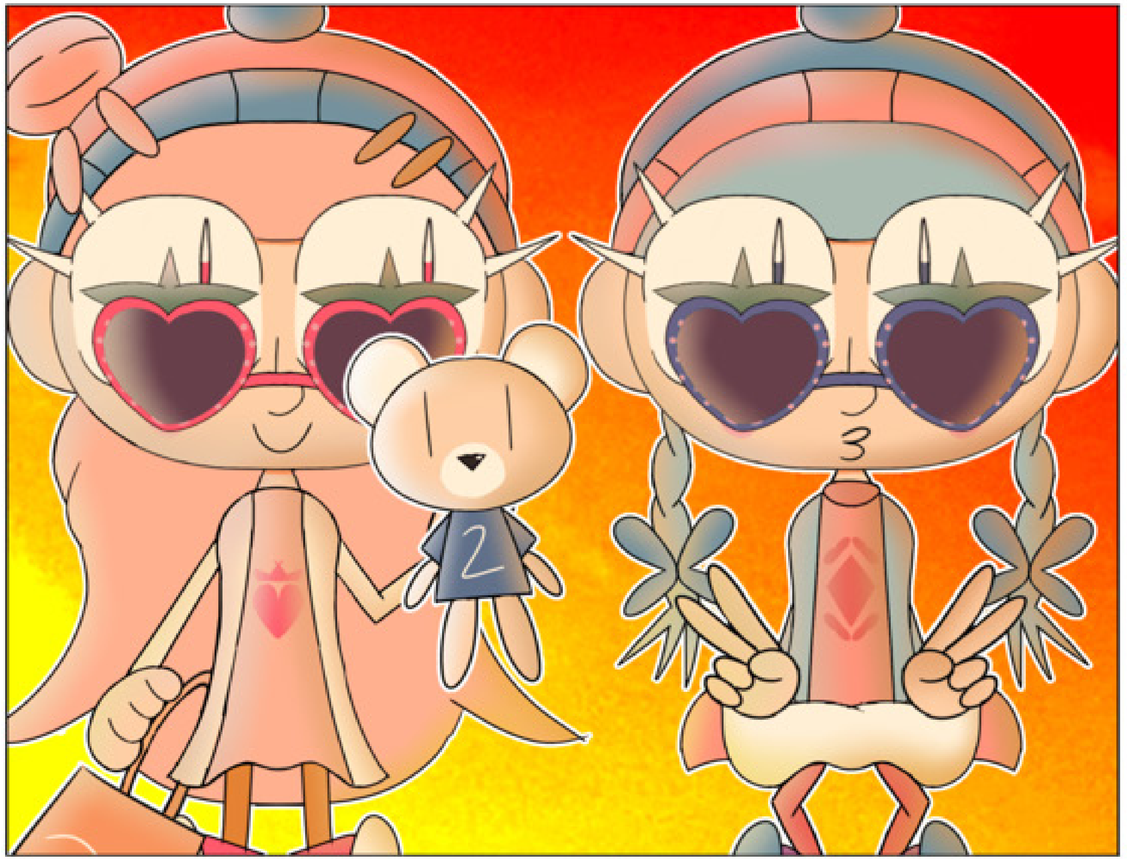
RUB
RUB
RUB
RUB
RUB

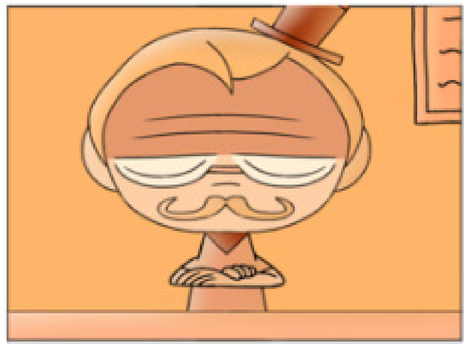
THANK YOU, BABY.
END.

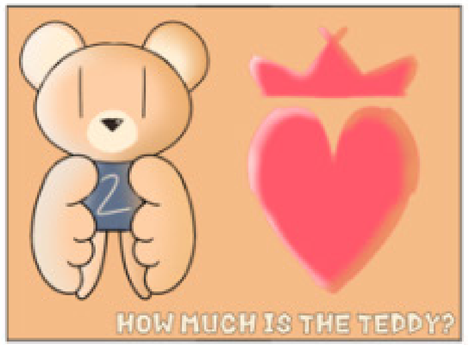
Nostalgic
Promises

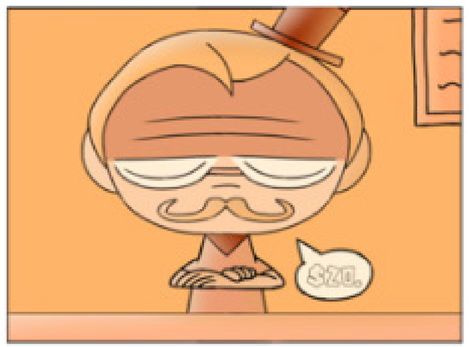
Ivan

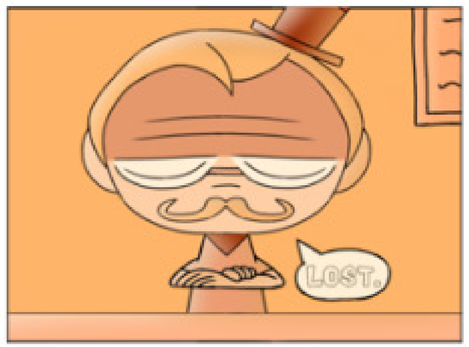
Suncoast Strawberries











TEDDY JERSEY BEAR #2 (VALUE RANGE: $20 – $30)

A PRIZED ITEM INSPIRED BY THE SEQUEL TO A BELOVED HALF REAL, HALF ANIMATED COMEDY. FROM THE SORT OF COMEDY THAT US MIDDLE SCHOOLERS CAN ONLY WITNESS WITH ID CARDS AND MAXIMUM PARENTAL GUIDANCE!

RUMOR HAS IT HE CAN TALK, BUT HIS QUOTES HAVE WORN THEIR WELCOME LONG BEFORE CUSTOMERS CAN PURCHASE. BELIEVE ME, I BUY SOMETHING ABOUT HIM INDICTED HE'S ALREADY ANNOYED PLENTY AT COSTLY CONCERTS.

We start tomorrow.

...so when are we going to start...

Y'know what, we can start tommorrow

(tommorrow never came...)

Credits!

So Diva!

Maryam
Co-Owner , Designer, Writer, and Researcher

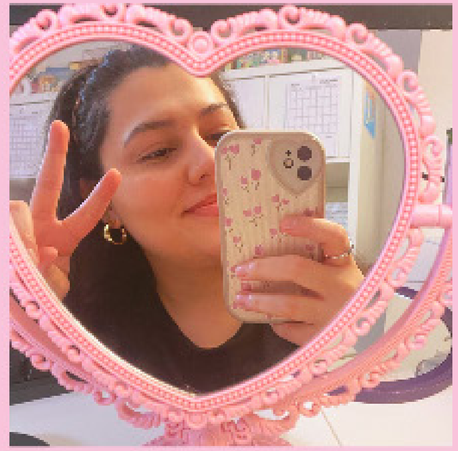
Designed -Entire So Diva Magazine.
Wrote - Top Divalicious creators of the Month, Passing of Catherine O'Hara, Pretty Pretty Please Episode 2.

Fatma
Co-Owner , Writer, and Researcher

Wrote -Divas In FILM, Divas In TV, Divas In TOYS, Divas In LITERATURE, "Star Girl Controversy" and "DTI Valentine's Day update" in the Divas in GAMING section. Diva News - The Tragic Story of Wuthering Heights.

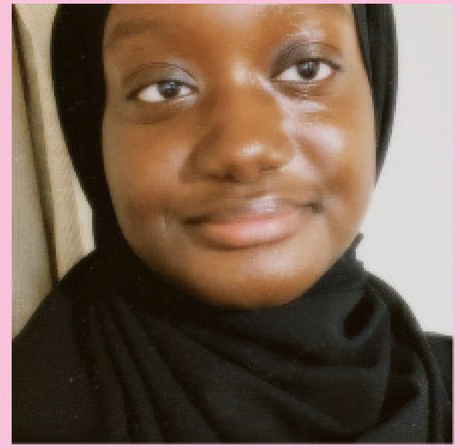
Makayla
Co Writer and Researcher

Wrote - Divas in GAMING.



Aminata
Copy Editor and Proofreader

Wrote - Emily Ann Shupe in Top Divalicious Creators of the month section.
Edited - Divas in FILM, Divas in TV, Divas in GAMING, Divas in TOYS, Divas in LITERATURE, Diva News - The Tragic Story of Wuthering Heights.



Credits!

So Diva!

AppleJewelArtz

Creator of "Nostalgic Promises"

You can find AppleJewelArtz on TikTok and Instagram @AppleJewelArtz

Bambi

Creator of "We Start Tomorrow"

You can find Bambi on Pinterest@justbambii

Funtastic

Creator of "Suncoast Strawberries"

You can find Funtastic on Instagram @_Funtastic.Tendo_ and @_Funtastic.Paradise_

On Twitter @TendoFun

And on BlueSky @Funtastic.Bsky.Social

So Diva!

THE Girly Media Magazine

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Scan the QR code or visit the link below!

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